

Childlikeness in the writings of Pu Songling (1640-1715)

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Declaration

All work, unless otherwise acknowledged, is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

signed:

date:

Abstract

Pu Songling is well known for his recurrent failure to progress up through the civil service examination system, despite repeatedly taking the provincial level exam over a time-span of forty years. Nevertheless, he was able to produce a highly acclaimed work of literature, his monumental anthology of short stories, the *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (Liaozhai zhiyi), together with a large volume of poetry, plays and other writings. My thesis considers the dichotomy between his lack of worldly success in a scholastic career, and his evident literary genius, within the context of an idealisation of innocence and childlike purity.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw what has been described as a “cult of the child” develop in many spheres of Chinese writing. Idealisation of childlikeness and innocence is exemplified by the influential essay “On the childlike mind” (*tongxin shuo*) by Li Zhi (1527-1602). For those who subscribed to views such as Li’s, genuineness, spontaneity and idealism were venerated, and worldly wisdom, cunning and falseness were despised. This naturally appealed to the growing number of literati like Pu Songling who, trapped within the stultifying examination system, were unable to fulfil their Confucian vocation and thus were rendered socially redundant.

The contradiction between Pu’s ideals and the reality in which he finds himself is reflected in his creative writing. By idealising naive innocence and purity, in keeping with contemporary trends of literati thought, Pu is able to vent his frustration. In this thesis I consider three aspects of childlikeness in Pu’s writings: fantasy, naïveté and folly.

Modern psychoanalytical research defines the characteristics of a child’s mind-set to include an all-encompassing view of the world, with an inability to distinguish between the inner self and the outer world, reality and fantasy, and animate and inanimate phenomena. These themes are pervasive throughout the *Liaozhai* tales, with the extensive use of dream, hallucination and illusion, as well as personification of the

natural world and inanimate objects. While some of these themes have been identified as contributing to the 'strangeness' of the work, I argue that they also reflect childlike aspects of the collection.

Moreover, a remarkable number of male protagonists in the tales are characterised by extreme naiveté. This is manifested in their attitudes and abilities in the areas of sex, money and studying. Characters are depicted as ignorant of the facts of life, inept at business management, or overly literal in their reading and studying, persistently interpreting texts at the wrong level. They are often contrasted in this naiveté with a sexually proficient, worldly wise and witty female fox spirit. A constant implication of these tales is that the naive sincerity of the idealistic characters is incompatible with examination success.

The third strand of my thesis is an analysis of the concept of folly (*chi*). While there have been some studies of this concept in the *Liaozhai*, they are mainly confined within the discourse on obsession. While obsession is one aspect of the meaning of the term *chi*, my survey of Pu Songling's recurrent usage of the term demonstrates that it has a much wider application than this, and conveys a single-mindedness typical of an infantile outlook, and a social dysfunction which can either be positive or negative in its application.

This thesis as a whole attempts to broaden the concept of the childlike mind to reflect contemporary Chinese thought and demonstrates the manifestation and significance of these ideas in Pu Songling's writings. While some short articles have analysed the influence of the cult of the child on other seventeenth century writers, this is the first comprehensive study in any language of the childlikeness inherent in Pu's works.

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My *pipa* tutor, Wang Yi'e 王一鶚, provided the initial inspiration for this project when I was working in China in 1993. His enthusiasm for the *Liaozhai*, and description of them as 'fun' (*haowan* 好玩), encouraged me to begin reading through the tales and, to the relief of many, to give up attempting to learn the *pipa*.

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Chapter 1 ~ Introduction

The work for which Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) is best known is his collection of around five hundred short tales,¹ entitled the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異. Often translated in English as *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*,² it is commonly referred to, in both languages, in the abbreviated form the *Liaozhai*, and I will follow this practice. These tales deal with a variety of themes, the most famous being the relationships between the (mostly female) fox spirits and ghosts and their mortal counterparts, who are usually scholars. Besides these there are also a large number of short, anecdotal tales of bizarre happenings or supernatural phenomena. The anthology proved hugely popular, and later imitations of the *Liaozhai* began to appear soon after Pu Songling's death.³ The enduring appeal of the collection is clear from the dramatisation, in more recent years, of many of the tales, for television and film.⁴

In contrast, Pu Songling, as was the case with many premodern Chinese writers, did not enjoy such success in his attempts to pursue a career as an official, a process which involved participation in a complex and, in the upper stages in particular, often intellectually stultifying system of civil service examinations. The contrast between Pu's public failures in this respect, with his monumental success as a writer, forms part of the backdrop to this thesis.

¹ Due to inconsistencies in different editions of the tales, the exact number of tales varies: some editions, for example, combine certain stories with their sequels, while others treat them separately. See below for information on editions used.

² Other English translations of this title include *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Giles, 1908), *Liaozhai's Records of the Strange* (Zeitlin, 1993), *Strange Stories from the Leisure Studio* (Hom, 1986), *Strange Tales from Make-Do Studio* (Mair, 1989), *Notes on Strange Matters from the Studio of Idleness* (Idema and Haft, 1997) and *Tales of the World of the Unusual from the Studio for Deliberation and Musing* (Chang and Chang, 1998).

³ Examples of anthologies directly imitating the *Liaozhai* are Shen Qifeng 沈起鳳's *Xie duo* 諧鐸 [The humorous clapper]; He Bang'e 和邦額's *Yetan suilu* 夜譚隨錄 [Random records of night-time conversations]; Yuan Mei 袁枚's *Zi bu yu* 子不語 [What the Master did not speak of]; and Ji Yun 紀昀's *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 [Random jottings from a thatched cottage]. These anthologies all appeared in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁴ For a discussion and comparison of the various televised and film versions which have come out in recent years, see Wang Fucong 王富聰's *Liaozhai ying shi pinglun* 聊齋影視評論 [A critical evaluation of film and television versions of the *Liaozhai*] (Jinan: Shandong wenyi cbs, 1993).

In both Chinese and Western scholarship, the *Liaozhai* is repeatedly hailed as representing a pinnacle in the development of the Chinese classical tale.⁵ Much modern Chinese scholarship on the *Liaozhai*, as is the case with most classical literature, has been greatly influenced by the prolific early twentieth century writer Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936). In his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, 中國小說歷史略, Lu Xun categorised the *Liaozhai* as “using a *chuanqi* style to create *zhiguai*” (*yong chuanqi fa, er yi zhiguai* 用傳奇法，而以志怪).⁶ This evaluation has been echoed repeatedly by later scholars and has gained general acceptance. The history of the Chinese classical short story is not my focus here, but to provide a context for some later criticism, I will very briefly outline these two literary traditions with which the *Liaozhai* is associated.

- The *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* traditions

The *zhiguai* 志怪 (records of anomalies) tradition has been defined by Kenneth J. Dewoskin as “collections of brief prose entries, primarily but not exclusively narrative in nature, that discuss out-of-the-ordinary people and events.”⁷ This type of tale can be traced back to the Six Dynasties period (222-589), with writers such as Gan Bao 干宝 (286?- 336), whose *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Sou shen ji* 搜神集) is seen as the definitive work of this genre. The tales were generally concerned with material considered unworthy of inclusion in the official dynastic histories, such as local legends, bizarre barbarians, conjurers, fox spirits, biographies of the immortals and occasionally exposés of the private lives of corrupt officials or even the emperor. This varied subject matter indicates an unprecedented degree of broadmindedness on the part of the Six Dynasties writers. Since the subject matter of the stories was often disdained by the conservative literati, none of the original editions of any of these works is extant, but the

⁵ This evaluation is repeated, in almost identical wording, in most Chinese surveys of fiction. Examples include: Zhang Jun 張俊 (ed.) *Qingdai xiaoshuo shi* 清代小說史 [A history of Qing fiction] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji cbs, 1997) p. 196; You Guo'en 游國恩 (et.al. eds.) *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 [A history of Chinese literature] (Beijing: renmin wenxue cbs, 1996) (rep. of 1964 edition) Vol. 4, p. 252; Zhang Renrang 張稔穰 *Zhongguo fenti wenxue shi: xiaoshuo juan* 中國分體文學史：小說卷 [A history of Chinese literary genres: fiction] (Qingdao: Haiyang daxue cbs, 1995), p.196.

⁶ The twenty-second chapter of Lu Xun's classic deals mainly with the *Liaozhai*.

⁷ See Kenneth J. Dewoskin's entry in *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* [ICTCL] p.280.

tradition was revived during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and, with the sudden increase in publication at that time, various versions of the stories were then popularly available. "It can be argued that the *zhiguai* established the degrees and kinds of supernaturalism and coincidence -- in general, the canons of plausibility -- that were tolerable in later literary fiction, and in so doing they defined the world in which later fiction functioned in its distinctive role as mock history."⁸

The other major literary tradition with which the *Liaozhai* is associated was known as the *chuanqi* 傳奇, or marvel tale, and emerged during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Having a more structured format than the *zhiguai* tales, the *chuanqi* begin with a stylised statement of the names of the characters, placing them within a historical and geographical setting. The subject matter deals with human characteristics, emphasising personal reactions to unusual situations. The narrator is generally external to the plot, adding only perhaps an introductory and concluding framework to the main narrative. Characters and plots tend to be variations on a single theme, and good always triumphs in the end. Sarah Yim classifies Tang *chuanqi* as either 'polished anecdotes' or 'tales proper'. "The polished anecdote is distinguished from the tale by its length (under 900 characters) and its one-incident plot, which very often has to do with an encounter with the supernatural. Patterns involving moral themes of wrongs made right do not appear in this group. The tale proper, then, consists of those pieces which are generally longer than 900 characters, frequently encompass more than one incident and contain moral overtones."⁹

While *chuanqi* tales also deal frequently with supernatural themes, these tend to be secondary to the main plot and more humanised, less intimidating than in the *zhiguai* stories. While they draw on historical biography and poetic allusion, they are often witty and entertaining. The early Tang (pre-830) *chuanqi* are generally longer, more experimental, and more personalised than the later examples, when the genre became more standardised, more of the "polished anecdotes" were produced, and the ties to the

⁸ Ibid. p. 283.

⁹ Yim, *ICTCL* p. 357.

zhiguai and poetic traditions were less obvious. While the *chuanqi* tradition was somewhat overshadowed by the rise of the colloquial story in the late Song, the Tang Dynasty's contribution to the development of Chinese fiction cannot be overstated.

Ji Yun's 紀昀 (1724-1805) main criticism of Pu Songling was what he saw as Pu's misguided attempt to combine the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* genres. Ji stated: "it is extraordinary today to find two literary forms in one work. Tales which record things men have heard or seen should be pure narrative, not works of fantasy like plays on the stage."¹⁰ Almost all of the *Liaozhai* stories include some kind of supernatural element. This fact in itself places the anthology within the *zhiguai* tradition. Most early *zhiguai* tales were typically concise and simply structured. It is mainly because of the greater complexity in characterisation and plot that the *Liaozhai* has been simultaneously identified within the *chuanqi* tradition. However, it is worth remembering that the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* categories were only formally distinguished as late as the sixteenth century, by Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602).¹¹ Therefore, while Lu Xun's definition is undoubtedly useful and insightful retrospective comment, it is quite likely that Pu Songling himself had less of a concrete set of distinctions between the two traditions, and was probably not consciously setting out to bridge them.¹²

- Other scholarship on the *Liaozhai*

Aside from literary history, another area of predominantly Chinese scholarship on the *Liaozhai* lies in the painstaking textual comparisons of different editions. I will outline some of the recent achievements of scholars in this field later in this chapter. The journal *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究 [Pu Songling studies] was launched in 1989 and now

¹⁰ Cited in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, p. 262.

¹¹ While both terms had been in use before this, definitions varied considerably, and there is no evidence to suggest such a strict delineation between the two traditions before Hu.

¹² Despite this, the prevailing influence of Lu Xun's designation was clearly evident at the *Liaozhai* studies conference in Zichuan (2001), when a mildly critical analysis of it in an article by Wang Ping 王平 "Yong chuanqi fa er yi zhiguai' zhiyi 用傳奇法，而以志怪質疑" [Questioning "Using a *chuanqi* style to create *zhiguai*"] (*Pu Songling yanjiu*, 2000:3-4 pp.98-109), provoked long controversy and debate.

appears on a quarterly basis published by the Pu Songling Research Institute located in Pu's hometown of Zichuan 淄川, Shandong. This organisation has also helped sponsor two nationwide conferences on the *Liaozhai* (1980 and 1985) and two international conferences on *Liaozhai* studies (in 1991 and 2001) in Zichuan. *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan* 蒲松齡研究集刊 [Collected papers in Pu Songling studies], published by Shandong University, ran to four editions and included some very influential scholarly articles. The Pu Songling centre at the university still exists, and much *Liaozhai* scholarship is still produced by the Chinese department there, but the journal was discontinued due to lack of funding.

There have been to date only two book-length academic studies of the *Liaozhai* in English. The most influential, Judith T. Zeitlin's seminal *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese classical tale*,¹³ has been very highly praised, and was described in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* as a possible "model for the reading of Chinese texts in general."¹⁴ Zeitlin focuses on three main themes, those of dreams, obsession and dislocation of gender, and examines how, in each case, Pu Songling redefined or recreated 'the strange'. The other major work in English is *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715*, by Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, which draws widely on historical sources and is, in the authors' own words, "an exercise in intellectual and cultural history."¹⁵ Allan Barr has written several authoritative articles on textual issues and dating of editions and individual tales and is a major contributor to the body of Chinese evidential scholarship.¹⁶ Yang Rui has undertaken some innovative research, using mainly Freudian

¹³ Zeitlin, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ *HJAS* 55 (1995), p 541.

¹⁵ Chang and Chang (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998) p. 4.

¹⁶ "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*" *HJAS* 44 (1984), pp 515-562. "A Comparative Study of the Early and Late Tales in *Liaozhai zhiyi*" *HJAS* 45 (1985), pp 157-202 and "Pu Songling and the Qing Examination System" *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (1986), pp. 87-111. As I will describe later in this chapter, part of Barr's unpublished PhD thesis (University of Oxford, 1983) "Pu Songling and *Liaozhai zhiyi*: a study of textual transmission, biographical background, and literary antecedents" served as the starting point for my thesis.

psychoanalysis to dissect various tales in the collection.¹⁷ The *Liaozhai* is also often discussed in generic or thematic studies of early Qing fiction.¹⁸

- My approach

A recent article by Wang Hengzhan 王愷展 has described “the encyclopaedic form and nature (*baike quanshu xingshi yu xingzhi* 百科全書形式與性質) of the *Liaozhai*,” noting that it is a huge resource for studies of literature, philosophy and social history.¹⁹ Ever since I began my own study of the collection, I have increasingly become aware of the truth of this. The variety of themes, characterisation and form within the collection, together with the volume of Pu Songling’s other extant writings allow for a vast number of different approaches to the work.

In this thesis I have identified aspects of what I have termed ‘childlikeness’ in Pu Songling’s writings. I consider how these relate to the sixteenth and seventeenth century discourse on childhood, exemplified by the concept of the childlike mind (*tongxin* 童心) advocated by thinkers of the so-called leftist wing of the Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) school, such as Li Zhi 李贄 (1527--1602).

In order to explore this, I will focus both on Pu Songling’s writings, and on what we know about his life. Much autobiographical information about Pu’s life can be gleaned from his less well-known writings. Pu was also an accomplished poet, playwright and all-round man of letters. The five hundred or so *Liaozhai* tales constitute only around a third of his complete works. While these are certainly the most important in terms of literary

¹⁷ See, for example, “Oedipal Fantasy in Disguise: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Liaozhai zhiyi*.” *Tamkang Review* 1994 (Winter); Vol. 25 part 2, pp. 67-93.

¹⁸ Two important collections are Wai-yee Li (ed.) *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Eva Hung (ed.) *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), each of which contains a chapter on the *Liaozhai*.

¹⁹ “*Liaozhai zhiyi baike quan shu xingshi yu xingzhi qian shuo* 聊齋誌異百科全書形式與性質淺說” [A brief discussion of the encyclopaedic form and nature of the LZZY] by Wang Hengzhan, in *Liaozhai xue yanjiu lunji* 聊齋學研究論集 [A collection of papers on *Liaozhai* studies] pp. 1-15.

value, his other writings should not be neglected. Selected poems are often included in Qing anthologies, and his plays are beginning to receive more scholarly attention. While much of my focus is on the *Liaozhai* itself, I will frequently refer to Pu's other writings throughout this thesis.

Due to the nature of Chinese traditional scholarship, it is impossible to separate entirely the fields of literature, history and thought. Indeed in Chinese discourse the three are often treated as a whole (*wen shi zhe* 文史哲). The majority of Chinese writers in each of these fields spent much of their lives studying the Confucian classics, in response to the requirements of the examination system. This is particularly so in the case of Pu Songling, who spent over forty years of his life within this system.²⁰ While we can still classify individual literati as primarily creative writers, historians, or philosophers, the cross-influences between these fields should not be overlooked. I believe that in a Chinese context it can be illuminating to consider one field in the light of another and it is for this reason that I have adopted this approach.

In chapter 3 of this thesis, I will examine the development of what has been termed the 'cult of the child' in the late Ming period. Although Pu Songling lived in the early Qing period, the influence of these doctrines is evident after the fall of the Ming. There is, of course, no reason that a philosophical school should be confined within a single dynasty in any case. In de Bary's words, "Qing thought is the direct heir of the Ming, even though it prefers not to acknowledge this indebtedness."²¹ The trends of thought current at this time, which have been described as forming China's romantic movement,²² also greatly influenced the next generation of scholars.

²⁰ I will discuss the relationship between Pu and the examination system in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

²¹ Wm. T. De Bary, *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970) p. 24.

²² See eg. Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩's *Wenxue shixue Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 文學史學明清小說研究 [Literary historical studies of Ming and Qing dynasty fiction] pp. 147-153.

- The childlike appeal of the *Liaozhai*

The *Liaozhai zhiyi* evidently has some inherently childlike features. A remarkable number of Chinese critics of the *Liaozhai* begin their articles with a personal statement of their own nostalgic affection for the stories, an attachment usually originating in childhood, but undiminished in adult life.²³ The publication of various children's editions of the tales demonstrate the continued popularity of the collection among Chinese children today, and many individual tales have been discussed in terms of "children's literature".²⁴ The themes of ghosts and animal spirits, transcendence between the animate and the inanimate worlds,²⁵ and the playfulness inherent in many of the stories are naturally attractive to child readers.²⁶

²³ Many examples of this can be found in a collection of musings on the *Liaozhai* by various intellectuals through the ages entitled the *Liaozhai ti yong* 聊齋題詠 [Inscriptions and Eulogies on the *Liaozhai*], compiled by Lu Tong 魯童 and Zhou Yanxiang 周雁翔 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi cbs, 1987). The following all begin with a declaration that their love for the collection began in childhood: Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶, p 3; Zang Kejia 臧克家, p 43; Ge Baoquan 戈寶權, p 52; and Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 p 180. In addition, individual studies of the *Liaozhai* by Chinese critics also often begin in this way, for example Yuan Shishuo's *Pu Songling shiji zhushu xin kao* 蒲松齡事跡著述新考 [A new investigation into Pu Songling's life and work] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1988) p.1; Dong Wanhua 董婉華's *Cong Liaozhai zhiyi de renwu kan Qingdai de keju zhidu he songyu zhidu* 從聊齋誌異的人物看清代的科舉制度和訟獄制度 [The Civil Service Examination System and the Litigation System in the Qing Dynasty, as seen in characters from *Liaozhai*] (Taipei: Chia Hsin Foundation, 1976), p.1; Yang Changnian 楊昌年's *Liaozhai zhiyi yanjiu* 聊齋誌異研究 [A study of the *Liaozhai*] (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1996) p1; Mu Hui 牧惠's *Liaozhai xian kan* 聊齋閑侃 [A frank discussion of *Liaozhai*] (Tianjin: Bai hua wenyi cbs, 1997) p1; Dan Minglun's preface will be discussed below.

²⁴ Examples of anthologies include the *Liaozhai yuyan tonghua yizhu* 聊齋寓言童話譯注 [Annotated translations of *Liaozhai* allegories and children's stories] edited by Sheng Wei 盛偉 (Jilin: Jilin wen shi cbs, 1990). The Taiwanese scholar Huang Shengxiong 黃盛雄 has written an article evaluating the collection as children's literature: "You tonghua kan *Liaozhai zhiyi* 由童話看聊齋誌異" [Looking at the *Liaozhai* in terms of writing for children] in the journal *Shuping zhuanlan* Issue 2 pp.11-14.

²⁵ See Freud's essay "The Uncanny" in *Art and Literature*, J Strachey [trans.] and Albert Dickson [ed.] (London: Penguin 1990), pp. 354-5: "We remember that in their early games children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and inanimate objects, and that they are especially fond of treating their dolls like live people....the idea of a 'living doll' excites no fear at all; children have no fear of their dolls coming to life, they may even desire it." I discuss the phenomenon of animism in the *Liaozhai* in detail in Chapter 4.

²⁶ Interestingly, however, Charlotte Furth notes that the contemporary medical establishment strongly warned against children reading ghost stories and the like, since it was felt that any such shocks, or frightening experiences, could endanger them physically. The fact that such warnings had to be given, of course, is also evidence of the inherent attractiveness of such subject matter to the very young. See Furth's "Concepts of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Infancy in Ch'ing Dynasty China" in *Journal of Asian Studies* (Vol. 46, no. 1, February 1987) pp. 24-5.

In his preface to the stories, the well-known commentator Dan Minglun 但明倫 (1795-1853) recalls his secret love of the tales as a child and how, one day, his late grandfather discovered what he was reading, and rebuked the boy, saying “a child’s knowledge is not yet fixed, how can he like tales of the supernatural?”²⁷ This, immediately reminiscent of Confucius’ “How can you understand death when you have yet to understand life?”²⁸, reflects the perceived unwholesome nature of the *zhiguai* tradition, that of tales of strange phenomena. It is notable that the young Dan Minglun was then able to justify himself to his grandfather, by reference to the orthodoxy, pretentiously explaining that his reading of these stories could further his understanding of the classics:-

“All I know is that I like the fact that in certain parts of certain passages the allusions are as meaningful as those in the *Book of History* (*Shujing*), as striking as the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li*), as exacting as the *Tan Gong* [a chapter of the *Book of Rites*], as ordered and abstruse as the *Zuo commentary* (*Zuo zhuan*), the *Conversations of the states* (*Guoyu*), and the *Intrigues of the states* (*Guoce*); from this I have gained greater understanding of the methods of textual composition.’

At this my grandfather’s anger turned to laughter.”²⁹

The subject matter of these tales, then, while eschewed by the establishment, can be described as inherently childish by nature. There is a natural and universal appeal to young minds of stories of the magical world of the supernatural, as evidenced, for example, by the recent phenomenal success worldwide of the Harry Potter novels. However, there is a further degree of playfulness and childlikeness in the *Liaozhai* tales which renders them more attractive to child readers than the majority of earlier *zhiguai* tales.

Karl S.Y.Kao has commented that the “*Liaozhai* as a whole has a strong ‘frivolous’ side to it,”³⁰ and I believe that this is another indication of the childlike appeal of its contents.

²⁷ 童子知識未定，即好鬼狐怪誕之說耶？Dan’s preface to the tales is cited in Ren Duxing’s edition, LZZY, on p. 2470. (I discuss the various editions of the *Liaozhai* later in this chapter).

²⁸ 未知生，焉知死？, from *The Analects* 11:12.

²⁹ LZZY p. 2470.

³⁰ Karl S.Y.Kao, “Projection, Displacement, Introjection: the Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*” in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature* (Eva Hung ed.) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), p.202.

The Qing critic Liu Yushu 劉玉書 compared what he considered to be the best of the *zhiguai* writers. He contrasts the way Pu Songling writes about the supernatural, ‘using ghosts and spirits for fun’ (*yi gui wei xi* 以鬼為戲)³¹ with Ji Yun’s didacticism, in which, Liu states “the ways of ghosts were used as a doctrine to supplement the teachings of the ways of the rites and of kings.” Playfulness, in itself intimately associated with childlikeness, was discouraged by the Confucian educational system. In the closing lines of the children’s *Three Character Classic* (*San zi jing* 三字經), *xi* is contrasted with *qin* 勤 (diligence). Children are admonished that, “diligence has its reward; play has no advantages (*qin you gong, xi wu yi* 勤有功，戲無益).”³²

Pu’s playfulness, I argue, reflects a broader sense of childlike innocence and purity which pervades the *Liaozhai* and sets it apart from early writings on the strange. In their earliest form, *zhiguai* writings set out to prove or disprove the existence of the supernatural. In this context, reality (*zhen* 真), was contrasted with illusion (*huan* 幻). For Pu Songling, this distinction was not at issue. Indeed, he seems to confront this question deliberately by blurring the very boundaries between human and non-human elements in his tales. The question of external “reality” is displaced by the concept of internal “realness” or “trueness”, real (*zhen* 真) as opposed to fake (*jia* 假), which is entirely subjective and concerns being true to oneself and one’s ideals.

Zhen was a concept much discussed by late Ming literati, and I will cover some of the debate in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The concept of *zhen*, in the sense of genuineness and purity, is closely linked to the idealisation of childlikeness among many seventeenth century literati: in some respects, it is the very essence of the childlike mind they pursued. I argue that these trends are also evident in many of Pu Songling’s writings.

³¹ This essay can be found in Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄 (ed.)’s *Liaozhai zhiyi ziliao huibian* 聊齋誌異資料匯編 [Sourcebook on *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*] (Henan: Zhongzhou guji cbs, 1986), pp. 614-5.

³² *San Tzu Ching: Elementary Chinese* Trans. and annot. Herbert A. Giles, (Taipei: Wen zhi cbs, 1984), pp. 149-150.

- Notes on Editions

Over the last two or three decades, there has been an impressive amount of Chinese evidential scholarship on dating and textual analysis of the various editions of the *Liaozhai*, the majority of which has been carried out in Shandong, either under the auspices of the Pu Songling research group at Shandong University, or else by the Pu Songling Research Institute. This has been supplemented by Allan Barr, who has published in both English and Chinese (as Bai Yaren 白亞仁) on this subject.³³ These achievements are the result of painstaking research and I am greatly indebted to these scholars. I will briefly summarise their findings to date.

The first printed edition of the *Liaozhai* was published in 1766, fifty-one years after Pu Songling's death. This edition, known as the *Qingketing* 青柯廳 edition, edited and published by Zhao Qigao 趙起杲 (d. 1766) and Bao Tingbo 鮑廷博 (1728-1814), comprised sixteen *juan*³⁴ and a total of 431 stories. However, handwritten copies of Pu's manuscript had been made and circulated among his acquaintances long before this. The *Zhuxuezhai* 鑄雪齋 edition is dated 1751 and is divided into twelve *juan*. It is named after the studio of Zhang Xijie 張希傑 (1689-1761+), who copied a manuscript from the Pu family.

In 1948, four *juan* of Pu Songling's own handwritten manuscript were discovered. While this constitutes only around half of the total anthology, nevertheless the impact on *Liaozhai* research has been significant. Due to the length of the collection, it is almost inevitable that copied versions will contain errors. Moreover, as is often the case with Chinese texts, versions copied during different eras would have to make some

³³ See Barr's "The textual transmission of *LZZY*" (mentioned above) and his "'Zhuzui daoren', 'Zhang mu' zuozhe yi fei Pu Songling '豬嘴道人'、'張牧'作者亦非蒲松齡" [The author of "The Pig-mouthed Daoist" and "Zhang the Shepherd" was not Pu Songling either] in *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 16 (1980, no.1) pp. 295-6. The latter article and related research resulted in the two tales mentioned being omitted from the 1981 revised version of the *San hui ben* (see below).

³⁴ I have retained the pinyin romanisation for *juan* 卷, sometimes translated as 'volume,' throughout this thesis.

modifications to comply with imperial taboos and so on. The literary inquisitions of the early to mid-Qing were also significant in restricting the subject matter of later copies.

In 1963 the acclaimed *The complete collated and critically annotated Strange Tales of Liaozhai* edition of the stories (*Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao, huizhu, huiping ben* 聊齋誌異會校會註會評) commonly known as the *San hui ben*, was published, edited by Zhang Youhe 張友鶴. Zhang based his version on the ten or so editions available. Pu's manuscript was taken as the authoritative version for the tales preserved there, with comparisons made with early copies and printed versions. For the remaining stories which had been lost, the *Zhuxuezhai* edition was taken as primary, and the *Qingketing* and other editions as comparative materials. Revised editions of the *San hui ben* appeared in 1978 and 1981. Until very recently, this edition has been the one favoured by scholars in this field, both for its breadth of sources, and the convenience of its layout, with critical comment and annotations inserted within the text throughout. In Judith Zeitlin's words, "this edition encompasses a virtual, though incomplete, history of *Liaozhai*'s interpretation."³⁵

In more recent years, however, there has been a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the *San hui ben* edition. This is partly due to the discovery of new editions. The *Kangxi* manuscript (*Kangxi chaoben* 康熙抄本), although discovered in the 1940s, was apparently not consulted by Zhang. Although only around half of this edition survives, it is perhaps the closest match to Pu's own manuscript. Later discoveries include the six *juan* manuscript entitled *Historian of the Strange* (*Yishi* 異史), discovered in Beijing in 1963, which includes the largest number of tales of any edition, and the *Twenty-four Juan* manuscript (*Ershisi juan chaoben* 二十四卷抄本), discovered in Zhoucun 周村, Shandong, in 1981, which is closer to the *Zhuxuezhai* edition.

After comparing these various manuscripts, the *Liaozhai* specialist Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩 concludes "we can see that the *Zhuxuezhai* manuscript is certainly not the closest version

³⁵ Zeitlin, *Historian*, p. 1.

to the original manuscript, in fact the opposite is true: of all the surviving editions, it has the most discrepancies with the original manuscript. Not only are the textual discrepancies more abundant than those in the *Qingketing* edition, there are also several places where editorial changes and deletions have been made.”³⁶

In 2000, Ren Duxing 任篤行 published his version of the *Liaozhai*. As was the case with the *San hui ben*, Ren takes the original manuscript as the authoritative version wherever possible, and does not make any modifications to this apart from “obvious handwriting errors”. For the remaining stories, the primary source is the Kangxi manuscript, with other editions as secondary and comparative materials. For the stories which do not survive in either manuscript, about a hundred or so in all, selection is made on the basis of all available versions, taking into account factors such as Pu’s customary use of language and so on.³⁷

In the funeral elegy written for Pu by his son, Pu Ruo 蒲箬, and also in the tomb inscription written by Zhang Yuan 張元 eleven years later, the *Liaozhai* is referred to as an eight *juan* anthology.³⁸ In accordance with this, Ren’s edition also divides the stories into eight *juan*, in contrast with the *San hui ben* which follows the *Zhuxuezhai* and other editions, with twelve *juan*. While it is perhaps still too early to predict, from early indications, and from the reception the book received at the *International Conference on Liaozhai Studies* in Zichuan in April 2001, it seems likely that Ren’s edition will replace the *San hui ben* as the standard academic version of the anthology. For this reason, I have used the Ren version throughout this thesis, when referring to the tales.³⁹ However, since major studies to date have referred to the *San hui ben*, I have included a table (Appendix 1) for ease of comparison and reference.

³⁶ See Yuan Shishuo’s foreword to the Ren Duxing edition, p.5.

³⁷ This summary of the selection process is mainly taken from the description in Yuan Shishuo’s foreword to Ren Duxing’s edition, pp.12-3.

³⁸ The texts of both of these can be found in Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄 (ed.)’s *Liaozhai zhiyi ziliao huibian* 聊齋誌異資料匯編 [Sourcebook on *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*] (Henan: Zhongzhou guji cbs, 1986) pp. 338-9 and pp.344-5.

³⁹ In all references to *Liaozhai* tales, I state first the number of the *juan*, and then the story number within it, according to the ordering of the Ren edition.

In addition to a large number of miscellaneous writings such as prefaces, letters and memorials to the emperor, Pu Songling was also an accomplished poet in the *shi* 詩, *ci* 詞 and *fu* 賦 forms, and a playwright. Opinions differ over the exact number of extant *shi* poems which are attributable to Pu Songling,⁴⁰ but there are certainly more than one thousand *shi*, around eighty *ci*, and ten *fu* extant, together with eleven short *qu* 曲, fifteen rustic plays (*liqu* 里曲) and three plays (*xi* 戲). Many of these writings, as well as aiding our understanding of Pu Songling's ideas, can also provide us with a rich source of information about his own thoughts and attitudes.

The first time that this huge resource was made readily available to scholars was in 1962, when Lu Dahuang 路大荒 published the *Collected Writings of Pu Songling* (Pu Songling ji 蒲松齡集 [PSLJ]) in two volumes. This was reprinted in 1986. Included in this is Lu's own *Biography of Pu Songling* (Pu Songling nianpu 蒲松齡年譜 [NP]). Drawing on later evidential scholarship, in 1998, Sheng Wei 盛偉 updated this and published the most comprehensive version to date of the *Complete Works of Pu Songling* (Pu Songling quanji 蒲松齡全集 [PSLQJ]). This event was deemed important enough to merit a long review in the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日報), in which the publication is described as being "of great significance to understanding Pu Songling and the society, history and culture of the period in which he lived."⁴¹ This three volume work, unlike Lu Dahuang's earlier anthology, includes the *Liaozhai* alongside Pu's other writings. In references to Pu's lesser-known writings, I have used the Sheng Wei edition.

⁴⁰ Six *juan* of poems were mentioned on Pu Songling's memorial stone inscription by Zhang Yuan 張元 in 1725. In a postscript to the *Liaozhai shiji* 聊齋詩集 [Collected *Liaozhai shi* poems] written in 1883, Gao Hansheng 高翰生 stated that there were 1295 poems, in five *ce*, extant at that time. Lu Dahuang included 1008 *shi* poems in the *Pu Songling ji*, while some new discoveries led Zhao Weifan 趙蔚芝 to include 1039 in his *Liaozhai shiji jianzhu* 聊齋詩集箋注 [Annotated *Liaozhai shi* poems] (Shandong daxue cbs, 1996). Finally, see Sheng Wei's afterword to the PSLQJ, pp. 3453-7 for his justification for inclusion of 1056 *shi* poems.

⁴¹ Wang Shuxian 王樹先, *Renmin Ribao* 13 April 1999, (overseas ed.) p. 3.

- Translations

Given the significance and popularity of the *Liaozhai*, it is curious that there is to date still no complete English translation.⁴² One of the earliest and most influential partial translations is Herbert Giles' *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. Giles (1845-1935), a former professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge, translates 164 stories, around a third of the total. The translations are very elegant, but are often incomplete or inaccurate, or else are so subjective and prejudiced with Giles' own agenda that the original meaning is sometimes lost. For example, the first footnote to the tale "Jia Fengzhi" (賈奉雉; 7:21) translated by Giles as "A Rip van Winkle", speaks for itself: "This being a long and tedious story, I have given only such part of it as is remarkable for its similarity to Washington Irving's famous narrative."⁴³ Another source of mild irritation for sinologists is Giles' free translation of story titles, which often bear no resemblance to the original, yet without providing any key. Thus, "Sun Bizhen" (孫必振; 6:44) becomes "A Chinese Jonah", while the title of "Scholar Gu" (顧生; 6:31) is translated as "A singular case of ophthalmia."

While other partial translations have been published, such as Rose Quong's selection of forty tales entitled *Chinese Ghost and Love Stories* in 1946, or the seventeen *Selected Tales of Liaozhai*, of 1981, translated (mainly) by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, and many anthologies of Chinese literature in translation contain at least one or two stories, the most popular few stories tend to be repeatedly selected and the more problematic, or less extraordinary are rarely anthologised. This is, of course, equally true of the many abridged versions of the collection in modern Chinese translation.

⁴² This seems particularly surprising since a complete translation of the *Qingkeing* edition into Italian (*Fiabe Cinesi*, by Ludovico Nicola di Giura, Mondadori publishing house) was published as early as 1955. Since then, translations into Japanese, Korean, and German have also been published. I understand that a French translation is also awaiting publication (I am grateful to Paolo Santangelo for this information).

⁴³ Giles, op.cit., p. 316.

In terms of the Chinese ideals of translation, namely faithfulness to the original text, approximation of meaning and elegance of expression (信, 達 and 雅),⁴⁴ Victor and Denis Mair's partial translation, entitled *Strange Tales from Make-Do Studio*, published in 1989, is the most successful to date.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, only fifty-one of the better known stories are included.

The most complete English translation available is entitled *Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio*, by Zhang Qingnian, Zhang Ciyun and Yang Yi, published by the People's China Publishing House in Beijing in 1997. They translate a total of 194 tales, including many of the less well-known tales, which have never previously been translated into English.⁴⁶ While the language is not very elegant, these translations are fairly accurate, although the important authorial comments at the end of several of the tales have been omitted.⁴⁷

• Conclusion

The initial inspiration for this project came from a short section of Allan Barr's doctoral thesis, in which he discusses the romantic orientation of the *Liaozhai*⁴⁸ and concludes, "it appears that among unconventional literary men like Pu Songling the individualistic and sentimental spirit fashionable in the late Ming continued to maintain its appeal." Noting the naiveté of many of the young protagonists in the tales, Barr suggests that "In some ways, they embody the unspoiled, unregimented spirit which, Li Zhi suggested, was a necessary condition for the complete fulfilment of the individual."⁴⁹ In this thesis, I will

⁴⁴ These criteria for good translation practice were first proposed by the great translator Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853-1921) and are still frequently cited in textbooks of translation for Chinese students.

⁴⁵ Mair and Mair, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989).

⁴⁶ The editors incorrectly state in their introduction that this is the most complete translation into any foreign language. As noted above, this only applies to the English version.

⁴⁷ One unfortunate inaccuracy is the translation of the tale "Xiang Gao" (向杲; 5:02), translated as "In the form of a tiger", in which the prostitute, named Bosi (名波斯) with whom Xiang Gao's brother has an affair is incorrectly stated to be "a prostitute from Persia" (PCPH, p. 161).

⁴⁸ Allan Barr, "Pu Songling and *Liaozhai zhiyi*: a study of textual transmission, biographical background, and literary antecedents". Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1983, pp. 217-226.

⁴⁹ "Pu Songling and *Liaozhai zhiyi*", p 220.

expand on Barr's idea and explore further the possible parallels between the idealisation of the child, exemplified by Li Zhi's writings, and the texts I have chosen.

In what follows I will discuss first Pu Songling's life and the social pressures which surrounded him, then trace the historical development of the idealisation of childhood in Chinese thought, before analysing my three major themes, of childlike consciousness, naiveté and folly in Pu's writings.

Chapter 2 ~ The author

In this chapter I will look at the life of Pu Songling, in the context of Pu's own claim that his creativity is driven primarily by his frustrated ambition. In the authorial preface to the *Liaozhai*, Pu states that the very act of writing these stories has formed an outlet for this lonely frustration which consumes him. I will survey the tradition in China of the release of such emotions through creative writing (*xie fen* 泄憤). The main reason for Pu's anguish is his successive failure to progress up the ladder of the civil service examination system, a predicament familiar to numerous Chinese literati. I will look at some aspects of the exam system, and argue that these to a certain extent define the nature of such frustration. I further suggest that position which a scholar such as Pu found himself in was, in the eyes of contemporary society, comparable to that of a child trapped in adolescence, unable, or unwilling, to reach adulthood.

- Pu Songling's life⁵⁰

Pu Songling 蒲松齡 was born in 1640 into a land-owning family in Zichuan 淄川 (part of present-day Zibo 淄博), whose fortunes were in decline. The Pu family were well-known in the locality and had, in the past, produced successive generations of scholars. Pu's own father was first and foremost a scholar, although he had been forced by dynastic change and financial necessity to become a merchant.

⁵⁰ This brief outline is based mainly on the following sources, which should be referred to for further details: the most authoritative biographical work on Pu Songling's life is Lu Dahuang 路大荒's *Pu Songling nianpu* 蒲松齡年譜 [Li Shizhao 李士釗 (ed.) (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1986) [hereafter NP] which is also included in the *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松齡集 (rev. ed. Shanghai: Shanghai guji cbs, 1986 [orig. ed. 1962]) [PSLJ] edited by Lu Dahuang, and the *Pu Songling quanji* 蒲松齡全集 (Beijing: Xuelin cbs, 1998) [PSLQJ] edited by Sheng Wei 盛偉. Scholars in Shandong have in recent years contributed much by way of evidential research on details of Pu's life. Representative of this is Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩's *Pu Songling shiji zhushu xinkao* 蒲松齡事迹著述新考 [A new investigation into Pu Songling's life and work] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1988); a less well known collection of articles by Yang Hairu 楊海儒, *Pu Songling shengping zhushu kaobian* 蒲松齡生平著述考辨 [An evidential study of Pu Songling's life and work] (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji cbs, 1994) is also very useful in correcting some errors in other contemporary studies; the short biography in Arthur Hummel (ed.) *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1944) Vol. 2 pp. 628-630 is a helpful introduction, despite being now somewhat out-dated.

Fond of study as a child, in 1658 Pu gained three first places in the district, prefectural and qualifying provincial exams.⁵¹ For some time his literary talent was held in great esteem and he was highly praised by his examiner, the poet and founder of the Yushan school 愚山學派,⁵² Shi Runzhang 施閏章 (1618-1683), who said Pu “reads books like other people gaze at the moon, moves his pen with the speed of the wind, and has the joy of one relaxed and free.”⁵³ This was the high point of Pu’s career. In 1659 he formed the Yingzhong poetry society 郢中社 with fellow students from the locality and was to all intents and purposes a diligent scholar whose prospects seemed bright. One of the co-founders of this society was one of Pu’s good friends, Zhang Duqing 張篤慶 who also did well in the first stage of the examinations and was likewise singled out for praise by Shi Runzhang.⁵⁴ Perhaps because they had so much in common, Zhang was one of the few friends with whom Pu remained close throughout his life.

However, the idealism and unconventionalism which seemed to have favoured Pu in the first stage of the examinations, formed a handicap for him further up the system. The differing natures of the county and provincial examinations meant that greater conformity to rules for the eight-legged essays, for example, was required in the latter exams, while examiners at the county and prefectural levels were freer to reward originality and innovation. In 1660, Pu failed the provincial exam for the first time, setting in motion a cycle of failure from which he was unable to escape for the next forty years.

⁵¹ See below for a description of the structure of the examination system.

⁵² Other members of this school include Shi Huang 施璜 and Yuan Jizi 袁繼梓. Shi Runzhang’s main aim seems to have been to reach a synthesis between the Wang school and orthodox neo-Confucianism. He claimed “Wencheng’s [Wang Yangming] idea of regaining innate knowledge was first expressed by Confucius and Mencius, and is not exclusive to him. Those who do not study, or those who take being guided by emotions and feelings as innate knowledge, but whose personal actions fall short of the mark, do Wang Yangming injustice.” For this citation and more on the Yushan school, see the entry on p. 1508 of *Zhonghua Ruxue Tongdian* 中華儒學通典 [Encyclopedia of Confucianism in China] Wu Feng 吳楓 and Song Yifu 宋一夫 (eds) (Haikou: Nanhai cbs, 1992)

⁵³ Shi Runzhang’s comments, originally appended to one of Pu’s examination essays, are cited in NP, p. 9. Shi was well known for his open-minded approach to the examinations, once praising an essay highly for its literary style, despite the candidate’s misinterpretation of the question (see Ma Ruifang, pp.18-19).

⁵⁴ For more on the life of Zhang Duqing, and his relationship with Pu Songling, see Yuan Shishuo, pp. 3-25

Unable to follow his favoured career path, in 1665 Pu took on the position of family tutor to the Wang family⁵⁵. In Confucian society, as far back as the Song dynasty, this post was also seen as that of an outsider, a failure, as described by Pei-yi Wu:-

“The private tutor, *men ke* 門客 or *kuang ke* 框客, because of his unofficial and ambiguous role in the social hierarchy and organization, was denied a place in Chinese institutional history. In contrast, the schoolteacher enjoyed much more respect. He might have had to contend with poverty and unruly pupils, but his was always an honorable profession. He could always point to Confucius as the most illustrious member of the calling, but the same cannot be said of the family tutor. His very mode of eking a living violated the Confucian code of etiquette, for the *Qu li* 曲禮 chapter of the Confucian classic *Li ji* 禮記 clearly stated that ‘it is proper to have students to come to the teacher for instruction; it has never been heard that a teacher would go to his student.’”⁵⁶

Allan Barr, in a study of Li Haiguan 李海關, adds “for most licentiates a tutorial post was often little more than an expedient way of supporting oneself and one’s family while awaiting the next provincial examination.”⁵⁷ Pu Songling’s own writings provide much satirical comment on the hard life faced by such tutors. His play “Nao guan” 鬧館, translated by Barr as “Begging to teach,” which was apparently extremely popular in the later Qing dynasty,⁵⁸ ends with a peripatetic schoolteacher agreeing to extremely harsh conditions when he is finally offered a post. In Barr’s translation:-

“After school and before dinner I’ll shovel soil in the pig-sty, in the evening I’ll fetch water from the well, if you’re busy I’ll look after the children and get the fire started, if you’re out of flour and the mule is not available I’ll grind the mill, I’ll sweep the yard and carry firewood and pick up droppings on the way, and when you have company I’ll wipe the table and bring in dishes.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See Yuan Shishuo pp. 75-99.

⁵⁶ Pei-yi Wu, “Education of Children in the Sung”, in De Bary ed. *Neo-Confucian Education: the Formative Stage* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989) p. 319.

⁵⁷ Allan Barr, “Four Schoolmasters: Educational Issues in Li Hai-kuan’s *Lamp at the Crossroads*” in Elman and Woodside (eds.) *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), p. 58.

⁵⁸ See Barr, “Four Schoolmasters”, p. 68.

⁵⁹ Cited and translated in Barr, “Four Schoolmasters”, p. 67.

The authorship of the novel *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳) remains in question, but much evidence suggests that the author was a contemporary of Pu's and also came from the same area of Shandong.⁶⁰ It is noteworthy, therefore, that the author also implores prospective teachers to run their own schools independently and warns them of the dangers in becoming dependent on an employer as a private tutor:-

"If you teach at someone else's behest, then after teaching for a year you still won't know whether they are going to employ you for the next. If you are given notice at the very end of the year, other families will already have made their arrangements, and you'll be stuck at home for a year with no money coming in. What's more, if you go to someone else's house, there's the whole question of getting on with them."⁶¹

One of Pu Songling's poems, "Expressing pent-up feelings in verse (*yong huai* 咏懷)", which was written in 1672, demonstrates his unease at being reliant on any employer. He likens himself to a cuckoo living parasitically in someone else's nest and describes the frustration that this loss of independence brings him.⁶²

A friend of Pu's, Sun Hui 孫蕙 (1632-1686) had been appointed county magistrate of Baoying 宝應 in 1669, and in the following year, invited Pu to become his private secretary in Baoying and then in Gaoyou 高郵 (two towns in Jiangsu province). This was the only trip Pu ever made of any distance and also provided him with an opportunity for contact with officialdom and national affairs. En route to Baoying, Pu wrote the poem,

⁶⁰ Hu Shi originally made the suggestion that Pu Songling had authored this novel, citing local dialect, time of publication and similarities in plot to the *Liaozhai* tale "Jiang Cheng 江成 (5:10)", in his essay "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan kaozheng 醒世姻緣傳考證 (An investigation of *Marriage destinies to awaken the world*)", appended to the Shanghai guji cbs (1981) edition of the novel. This has since been discredited and while various other possibilities have been put forward, the debate on the novel's authorship is as yet inconclusive. For a comprehensive study of this debate see Xu Fuling's 徐復嶺 *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun 醒世姻緣傳作者和語言考論* [An evidential study of the author and language of *Marriage destinies*] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1993).

⁶¹ Translated in Barr, "Four Schoolmasters" p. 69.

⁶² See LZSJ *juan* 1, p. 60, PSLQJ p. 1632.

“Qingshi pass 青石關”⁶³ which seems to express a feeling of loss of direction and anxiety about the future:-

“Here I am in this earthenware pot ⁶⁴ with a narrow neck,
I raise my head and see a bird flying past.
Clouds cover the southern and northern mountains.
I see people in the mountains,
But not a road in sight.
A woodcutter points the way with his axe handle
And I make my way through the weeds.
The winding curves reach the sky above
My horse’s steps have become uneven.
Suddenly I hear a dog barking
And some families gathering around a smoking fire.
As I pull on the harness I look back at where I’ve come
An endless stretch of emerald mist has formed”

Other poems written on this trip convey similar feelings of isolation and distress. “On the road” (Tu zhong 途中)⁶⁵ describes how Pu was driven to telling ghost stories to relieve his loneliness on the journey south. The two poems he wrote at this time entitled “To my family” (ji jia 寄家)⁶⁶ are full of the traditional nostalgia and home-sickness expected in a Chinese poem of that title, while “Breakfasting on the lake, finding a rhyme for the sound ‘fei’” (hu shang zaofan, de fei zi 湖上早飯，得肥字)⁶⁷ and “For Sun Shubai” (cheng Sun Shubai 呈孫樹百)⁶⁸ reflect his growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment with officialdom. These are themes which recur throughout Pu Songling’s writings.

Pu resigned his post in the early autumn of 1671. Despite the brevity of this position, it was his first and only sojourn any distance from his hometown and was very influential on his later life. In the words of Yuan Shishuo, “he broadened his horizons, increased his

⁶³ See LZSJ *juan*1 p. 1, PSLQJ Vol. 2, p. 1573.

⁶⁴ ‘Earthenware pot’ (weng) here is a pun on the name of the valley which he had to pass through, which used to be known as Wengkoudao 瓮口道, and was just below Qingshi pass. See Zhao Weifan’s annotation in *Liaozhai shiji* p. 1.

⁶⁵ See “Tu zhong” LZSJ *juan*1 p. 2, PSLQL Vol. 2, p. 1574.

⁶⁶ LZSJ *juan*1 p. 6, PSLQL Vol. 2, p. 1578.

⁶⁷ LZSJ *juan*1 p. 6, PSLQL Vol. 2, p. 1578.

⁶⁸ LZSJ *juan*1 p. 7, PSLQL Vol. 2, p. 1579. Shubai is Sun Hui’s *zi*. See Yuan Shishuo, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-74 for more biographical details and an account of the relationship between Sun and Pu.

experience, and witnessed many things that a man from his impoverished background would otherwise never encounter.”⁶⁹

Returning home to Zichuan, Pu Songling brought a letter of recommendation from Sun Hui, in the hope that this would help him avoid a repeat of his past failures in the provincial examination. However, it proved to be of no avail, and Pu failed again the following year.

Pu Songling was employed in 1679⁷⁰ by Bi Jiyou 畢際有 (1623-1693) as a tutor to Bi's grandsons, a post he held for thirty years. The son of Bi Ziyan 畢自嚴 (1569-1638), a former president of the Ministry of Finance, Bi Jiyou had an extensive collection of books through which Pu Songling was able to browse freely. His studies were not confined to history, philosophy and literature, but he also had a keen interest in subjects such as astronomy, agriculture, sericulture and medicine.

Pu Songling was an enthusiastic and hardworking student throughout his life but, after taking his capping graduation ceremony at nineteen, he failed repeatedly to progress any further in the examination system although, in 1682, he was awarded the rank of stipend student. Finally, in 1711 and at the age of seventy one, he was given the degree of tribute student on grounds of seniority (*sui gongsheng* 歲貢生). There is some dispute over exactly how long Pu had persisted in taking these exams, but it seems likely that he participated almost every three years until he was over sixty.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Yuan Shishuo, op. cit, p. 62.

⁷⁰ This date has been somewhat controversial. According to Lu Dahuang's biography, Pu began work at the Bi's residence in 1672 (*Pu Songling nianpu* p.21 ff.), immediately after his return from Jiangsu. However, later scholars have argued, mostly from the evidence of poems written and dated within this period, that during the seventies Pu spent some time at the Wang's residence, and possibly lived for a while with Gao Heng. The date now commonly accepted for Pu's move to the Bi's is 1679. (see Yuan Shishuo, op. cit. p. 148 for more details on this debate).

⁷¹ See Allan Barr, "Pu Songling and the Qing Examination system", in *Late Imperial China*, (Vol. 7, no. 1, June 1986) pp. 89-90 and Chang and Chang, *Redefining History*, pp. 30-4.

Pu Songling's relation with the examination system has been examined fairly extensively by scholars both within China and abroad.⁷² The examination system was a major factor in the lives of all educated young men in late imperial China and so it is natural that it should feature prominently in the literature of this period. The effect that repeated rejection had on Pu Songling's psychological state is clear from his poetry. Pu compares himself to the Jin 晉 Dynasty commander Yuan Ji 院籍 who was frustrated by the mediocrity of the so-called heroes he saw around him, and by his own lack of recognition.⁷³ The whole anthology of his poetry is peppered with phrases such as "Who in this world can recognise hidden talent? (shi shang he ren jie huai cai 世上何人解懷才)."⁷⁴

Allan Barr has noted that there were various problems specific to the examination system in Shandong in the early Qing, many of which were addressed in later years by government edicts and new regulations. Since these are particularly relevant to my study, I will summarise Barr's findings briefly here.⁷⁵ One of the problems was the excessively heavy workloads on examiners, and this had two major consequences: undue emphasis was given to the eight-legged essay section of the exam, rather than on the other sections, which "set questions of greater substance,"⁷⁶ but were more individual and so harder to mark; and mistakes in the grading of these essays were unavoidable. Another problem was the fact that examiners could be held responsible if they passed essays that their superiors considered unsatisfactory. "This led them to adopt a safety-first policy in grading, opting for predictable and stereotyped essays which they were confident would

⁷² See, for example, Wang Zhizhong 王枝忠, "Pu Songling yu keju" 蒲松齡與科舉, [Pu Songling and the exam system] in *Guoji Liaozhai lunwen ji* 國際聊齋論文集, [An International Collection of Theses on *Liaozhai*] Gu Meigao and Wang Zhizhong (eds.) (Beijing: Beijing shifan xueyuan cbs, 1992) pp. 7-20; Allan Barr, "Pu Songling and the Qing Examination system"; Dong Wanhua 董挽華, *Cong Liaozhai zhiyi de renwu kan Qingdai de keju zhidu he songyu zhidu* 從聊齋誌異的人物看清代的科舉制度和訟獄制度, [The Civil Service Examination System and the Litigation System in the Qing Dynasty, as seen in characters from *Liaozhai zhiyi*] (Taipei: Chia hsin foundation, 1977) pp. 14-63.

⁷³ See, for example, the last lines of Pu's poems "Ximei zhai zhong" 希梅齋中 [In Ximei's studio] and the third in the series "To Sun Anyi (Ji Sun Anyi 寄孫安宜)", PSLQJ p. 1621, LZSJ *juan* 1, p. 49 and PSLQJ p. 1625, LZSJ *juan* 1, p. 53.

⁷⁴ The final line of "Zhong qiu wei yu, su Ximei zhai" 中秋微雨宿希梅齋 [Staying at Ximei's study, during a mid-autumn shower], PSLQJ p. 1623, LZSJ *juan* 1, p. 51.

⁷⁵ Barr, "Pu Songling and the Qing examination system" pp. 92-103.

⁷⁶ Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

not provoke criticism.”⁷⁷ Other factors affecting the grading procedure included the quotas which each examiner was assigned for different grades of essays and, of course, corruption. Many examples can be cited from among Pu’s contemporaries of gifted scholars who remained unrecognised by the system. Barr concludes that the feeling of helplessness and frustration which these problems produced was widespread: “The extremely low pass rate and the irrational features of the selection process aroused in participants the sense that the whole system was one gigantic lottery in which they themselves could do little to improve their chances and where they were totally at the mercy of a higher force whose operations appeared random and unpredictable.”⁷⁸ Timothy Brook has also noted the huge increase in the numbers of *shengyuan* 生員 between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (he suggests the increase may have been twenty-fold) and compares this to the essentially consistent requirements of the bureaucracy.⁷⁹ This discrepancy would evidently lead to a growing class of socially disenfranchised, dissatisfied minor scholars.

On the twenty second day of the first lunar month of the fifty fourth year of the reign of Kangxi (1715) Pu Songling died. His life had been dominated by a sense of thwarted ambition, a kind of helplessness in the face of a seemingly impenetrable system. I suggest that this frustration, this conflict between Pu’s awareness of the need to follow the exam system, compounded with his inability to proceed along this path, resulted in his being locked in a permanent state of confusion. In the late imperial period, such a state was common to many aspiring literati. In what follows, I suggest that, in the eyes of the contemporary society, these frustrated scholars were as adolescents, both tormented and lacking direction, and with neither the confidence nor the authority of adulthood.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 100.

⁷⁹ Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 18.

- The path to adulthood

In traditional China, development from infant to adult was a clearly defined process, whether couched in philosophical or medical terms. Confucius set the trend for a numerical gauge against which to measure conduct at the different stages of maturity, as well as for the symbiotic relationship between a person's education, and their spiritual and emotional development, in the statement that: "At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was atuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line."⁸⁰

De Bary comments on this doctrine: "Here we find a confidence that human life can follow a meaningful pattern and by ordered stages of growth and maturity attain a freedom wherein one's spontaneous desires are naturally in accord with heaven, the moral order and vital power in the universe."⁸¹ It is notable that the years before the desire to study had been firmly established are not even mentioned in this timeline of an individual's development. In the early stages, the acquisition of knowledge seems to be the crucial measure of progress. In keeping with this, biographies of eminent people invariably stressed the age at which they mastered each of the classics.⁸²

Such a clearly defined numerical gauge for progress through life, directly linking age with achievement, is a common feature of Chinese philosophical writing. The *Book of Rites* (Liji 禮記) states that at seven years old, the child learns the virtue of yielding; at nine he learns how to serve his elders; and at nineteen, he begins to practise filial piety.⁸³

⁸⁰ *The Analects* (2:4) I have used D.C. Lau's translation.

⁸¹ De Bary *Self and Society*, p. 18.

⁸² Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) pp. 38-9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p 34.

Equally, the medical analysis of a child's development was numerically detailed, in both infancy, where metaphors of changing and steaming (*bian zheng* 變蒸) were used, and later, when associations with sexual development were more apparent:-

“The ‘changing’ works on physical aspects of organ systems, while the ‘steaming’ affects consciousness. With each crisis phase, a qualitative leap in the child’s development has occurred. At the end of eighteen cycles -- that is, after 576 days - - the process is finished. At a year-and-a-half the child is able to walk, understand speech, and can express the emotions of joy and sorrow. In light of these cognitive and emotional faculties, it has now ‘become human’ (*cheng ren* 成人), matured, and is recognizable as a human person.”⁸⁴

The later stages of childhood and young adulthood are further elucidated in the section of the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine* (*Huangdi neijing* 皇帝內經) entitled “On Heavenly Truth”:

“At seven *sui* 歲 a girl’s Kidney *qi* 氣 is flourishing; her adult teeth come in and her hair grows long. At fourteen she comes into her reproductive capacities (*tiangui zhi* 天癸至); her *ren* 任 pulse moves and her *chong* 衝 pulse is abundant; her menses flow regularly and she can bear young. At twenty-one her Kidney *qi* is even and calm, and so her wisdom teeth come in and her growth has reached its apogee.....At eight *sui* a boy’s Kidney *qi* is replete; his adult teeth come in and his hair grows long. At sixteen his Kidney *qi* is abundant, and he comes into his reproductive capacities (*tiangui zhi*); his seminal essence overflows and drains; he can unite yin and yang and so beget young. At twenty-four his Kidney *qi* is even and calm, and so his bones and sinews are strong, his wisdom teeth come in, and his growth has reached an apogee.”⁸⁵

In this way, a definitive standard for the progress from infancy to adulthood was enshrined within both the philosophical and medical traditions. Certain ceremonies, to mark the graduation from one stage to the next, such as the capping ceremony (*guanli* 冠禮) for boys were common, especially in the early period.

⁸⁴ Furth “From Birth to Birth: The Growing Body in Chinese Medicine”, in Kinney, *Chinese views of Childhood* (pp. 157-193), pp. 173-4.

⁸⁵ Cited and translated in Furth, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

- Examinations as milestones on the road to maturity

By the Qing dynasty, the capping ceremony and other rites of passage for adolescence were less common than in previous times and, if they did take place, they tended to be subsumed within marriage rituals, generally between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one for boys, and sixteen to eighteen for girls.⁸⁶ An alternative gauge of progress was the exam system, which defined the path of the intellectual through life, and divided it into different stages. Transcendence from one level to the next was surrounded by ritual and celebration.

The civil service examination system had been first fully consolidated under the Sui Dynasty (581- 618), in an attempt to reduce the power of the four main groups of families which had become especially dominant under the previous hereditary aristocracy. It was continued throughout the Tang (618 - 907), but problems were already emerging, notably the elitism of the system, which had a pass rate in the final exam of around one percent,⁸⁷ and the increasing development of factional conflicts and cliques, resulting from the close relationship between candidates and their examiners.

To try to resolve these problems, radical changes were implemented during the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279). Most important was the introduction of the palace exam (*dianshi* 殿試), held in the imperial palace in the capital and often supervised by the emperor himself. Not only did this allow the emperor to have greater control over government departments, but by removing the role of the examiner as supervisor of the final exam, it also greatly reduced problems of favouritism and clique-forming among individual candidates. Due to economic prosperity during the Song dynasty, more people had the financial resources to be able to spend years studying for the exams and the pass rate was

⁸⁶ See Richard J. Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage: the Qing dynasty, 1644-1912* (San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 253.

⁸⁷ Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell* (trans. Conrad Shirokauer) (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1976), p. 113.

also increased to around two percent.⁸⁸ Moreover, from Song times there was a strict division between civil and military officials.⁸⁹

Ming despotism led to greater introspection by scholars who were overshadowed by the power of the Emperor and the state. At the same time the examinations were simplified in order to 'democratise' them. De Bary comments that this encouraged a mechanical memorisation of both the classics and the Song commentaries along with an emphasis on technical training in the required literary forms which in turn posed a psychological dilemma for the Confucian scholar of the time. "The tension increased between his egalitarian ideals and his elitist standards, between his commitment to public service and his revulsion at careerism on a mass scale among supposed Confucians devoid of genuine intellectual and moral worth."⁹⁰ Moreover, with the late Ming⁹¹ expansion in the publishing industry, scholars had to cope with an ever-increasing volume of literature which had to be digested, and this threatened the maintenance of intellectual and spiritual integration so cherished in Confucian tradition.⁹²

To reject the examination system meant to stand alone outside society and officialdom. For those trained in traditional Confucian doctrines, this was a particularly undesirable situation and led to further inner conflict and complex dilemmas for the intellectuals whose very identity and vocation were at stake. In de Bary's words, "They suffered not only alienation from the established regime but also, in a more complex and indefinable way, estrangement from received tradition."⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid., p 114.

⁸⁹ The military exam system ran alongside the civil system, although with less prestige attached. However, both the minister of war (*bingbu shangshu* 兵部尚書) and the military affairs commissioner (*shumi shi* 樞密使) were civilian posts, as were most front-line generals. Thus military generals were excluded from participation in central government.

⁹⁰ De Bary *Self and Society*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Throughout this thesis, by "late Ming" I am referring to the period from around the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century.

⁹² Ibid., p. 9.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 8.

However, as a means of selecting officials for government posts, the exam system endured, relatively unchanged, from its inception until the late nineteenth century and proved effective throughout successive dynasties, of Chinese or foreign origin. Not only was it a ready-made system of selection, with an accompanying bureaucracy and administrative system already in place, it also proved an excellent way to keep the military in check. As such, it even proved popular with rebel movements, as Miyazaki notes:-

“The fact that even the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, which was established by the Taipings under the leadership of a failed licentiate, conducted a number of its own peculiar examinations shows better than anything else that governments found the examination system a most advantageous institution.”⁹⁴

In principle the exams were open to men from any background, except those whose ancestors had been engaged in a ‘base’ occupation and, while in practical terms those of very limited resources would have been unlikely to afford the time to study at such length, relatively speaking the degree of equality achieved by the system was admirable.

By the nineteenth century, however, the structure of the exam system seemed less relevant to the requirements of an increasingly industrialised world. While Japan’s Meiji government transformed the education system in 1872, the Qing government of China maintained the existing structure until, after the Boxer Uprising of 1900, it was announced that in 1904 the civil service examination system was to be abolished, thus ending a tradition which had lasted for thirteen centuries.

- titles and their implications

In Ming and Qing times, prior to gaining their first degree students were known as *tongsheng* 童生, or child-scholars. In order to be eligible to sit the first degree they would need to pass the county exam (*xianshi* 縣試) the prefectural exam (*fushi* 府試) and then

⁹⁴ Miyazaki, op.cit., p. 124.

the qualifying exam (*yuanshi* 院試 or *keshi* 科試), after which they would need to take the annual exam (*suikao* 歲考) every year to retain eligibility to sit the provincial exam (*xiangshi* 鄉試), which only took place every three years. These early exams were known collectively as ‘the children’s section’ (*tongzi ke* 童子科). Only those who remained eligible to take the *xiangshi* could exchange the title of *tongsheng*, for that of ‘cultivated talent’ (*xiucai* 秀才), or ‘government student’ (*shengyuan*).

After a man passed the provincial exam he was known as an ‘established person’ (*juren* 舉人), and was thus eligible to take the metropolitan exam (*huishi* 會試). Another term for *juren* was *xiaolian* 孝廉, or ‘filial and honest one’. On passing the metropolitan exam he was known as a ‘superior scholar’ (*gongshi* 貢士) and could then take the palace exam (*dianshi*) and gain the title of ‘advanced scholar’ (*jinshi* 進士).⁹⁵ I suggest the very terms *tongsheng*, *tongzi ke* and *xiaolian* and *juren* were indicative of a general expectancy on the part of the contemporary society that a student’s progress up the ladder of exam success would mirror his gradual physical and moral coming of age.

The sensitive relationship between age and degree success is also demonstrated in the well-known story of the “elderly child-scholar” (*lao tongsheng* 老童生) who, having repeatedly failed the provincial exam, decided to shave off his beard and disguise himself as a boy, for fear that a man of his age would be discriminated against, only to lose out once again when a change of the exam supervisor resulted in the sudden favouring of more senior candidates. Indeed, this topic was a fairly common source of anecdotal humour at this period.⁹⁶ Occasionally, at the other end of this scale, very young prodigies were given honours usually reserved for their seniors. Pei-yi Wu notes that in the Song

⁹⁵ In addition to these basic stages, other intermediate exams were added at various times, such as the re-examinations for provincial and metropolitan stages (Qing) and the special exams held intermittently to encourage hermits and recluses to take part in public service.

⁹⁶ The Qing anthology, *Xiaolin guangji* 笑林廣記 [The Expanded Forest of Jokes], for example, contains the account of a hungry tiger who waits outside the provincial exam hall for a young fresh bit of meat to eat. Unfortunately for him, he chooses a *lao tongsheng*, whose flesh is too tough for him to chew on and causes him pain. This reflects some of the satirical views of contemporary society to these aged candidates, who repeatedly fail the exams. See *Xiaolin Guangji*, (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui cbs, 1998) p. 65.

dynasty a young girl was once even granted the title of *juren*, after displaying her spectacular memory to the emperor.⁹⁷

Only those students who gained grades 1 or 2 in the children's exams were entitled to sit the qualifying exam for provincial candidates. If students passed these exams, but failed to gain a high enough grade, they would be punished according to their level of achievement: beaten (grade 4) or demoted (grade 5). This degrading system of penalties further demonstrates the humiliation and disrespect meted out to those candidates who failed to progress up this career ladder.

- The provincial examination as key to success

Generally speaking, for graduates of the metropolitan exam, the palace examination was merely a formality on the way to collect the *jinshi* degree. The importance of the other stages in the exam system varied somewhat throughout history, but in Ming and Qing times, the crucial step to securing a career in government was the provincial examination. Unlike in the Tang period, when official posts were only obtainable by *jinshi* graduates, the *juren* degree was by this time the defining qualification for officialdom.⁹⁸ In contrast, *shengyuan* belonged to the category of 'scholar-commoners' (*shimin* 士民), although they were distinguished from other commoners by being exempt from corvee duty. Ping-ti Ho notes some of the problems they encountered during this period:-

“Owing to their ‘unestablished’ status in both the legal and the social sense, they had to eke out a meager living whenever and wherever possible if their families

⁹⁷ See Pei-yi Wu, “Education of Children in the Sung” in W.T. de Bary and J. Chaffee (eds.) *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 315.

⁹⁸ There was a general expansion of the upper echelons of the degree system in late imperial China: Benjamin Elman notes that, by the end of the Ming dynasty, even the *juren* degree was no longer an absolute guarantee of a good position. See “Changes in Confucian Civil Service Examinations from the Ming to the Ch'ing Dynasty” in Elman and Woodside (eds.), *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* pp. 113-4.

were not rich. The majority of them taught in village schools or served as family tutors, often at subsistence wages.”⁹⁹

Further examples of the hardships faced by the social class of those yet to pass the hurdle of the provincial exam can be found in other literature of the period, notably in Wu Jingzi’s 吳敬梓 (1701-1754) *The Scholars* (Rulin Waishi 儒林外史) as well as in the seventeenth century Shandong novel *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World*, mentioned above. Judging by the number of such references in contemporary works, it appears to have been almost taken for granted that candidates in this early stage of the system would suffer poverty, frustration and ridicule.

Another degree status which was the envy of the *shengyuan* was that of tribute student, or *gongsheng* 貢生. These students were chosen from among the *shengyuan*, either on basis of pure merit, or on grounds of seniority. The difference between the *gongsheng* and the *shengyuan* was important, both economically and psychologically:

“The latter were ‘undergraduates’ subject to periodic tests supervised by provincial educational commissioners; as ‘undergraduates’ they had no opportunity of official appointment. Those holding the *gongsheng* degree were, on the other hand, considered as having ‘graduate’ status, were not subject to periodic tests, and were entitled to eventual minor official appointment.”¹⁰⁰

A further insult to the class of first degree holders was the ease with which anyone with money could, by the late Ming and Qing periods, gain the title of *jiansheng* 監生, or ‘member of the National University’. Originally a generic academic designation, denoting eligibility for the metropolitan level exam, by the later period, in order to raise money for the state, the *jiansheng* degree title began to be sold. The practice began in 1451, first only to *shengyuan*, but then to anyone with the funds. These sales continued sporadically throughout the period, culminating in mid to late Qing. During the Ming period, the *jiansheng* degree was in itself an entitlement to a minor official post.

⁹⁹ Ping-ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Late Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), p 36.

¹⁰⁰ Ho, op.cit., p 28.

“It would not be an exaggeration to say that in Qing times practically anybody who could afford a little over 100 taels could obtain the *jiansheng* title and the right to wear the scholar’s gown and cap.”¹⁰¹

Moreover, relief from the psychological pressure of the exam system could also be bought in this way since *jiansheng* were also not required to retake the qualifying examination. Chung-li Chang contrasts the situation for this group, who could live relatively pressure-free lives, only attempting higher levels of the system in their own time and as they felt ready, with the *shengyuan* who, since they had to be examined every few months merely to retain their status, “were never free from examinations”.¹⁰²

Ho points out, however, that one of the major differences in social categorisation between the Ming and the Qing was that by the later period the *jiansheng* was no longer considered a member of the official class, and so was ineligible for posts in government.¹⁰³ However, the early Qing government, financially burdened by the Nanjing Ming resistance and the subsequent rebellions of the three southern feudatories, took the sale of degrees a step further. “Indeed, between 1678 and 1682 the Manchu government not only sold offices and titles on a large scale but resorted to the almost unprecedented practice of selling the *shengyuan* degree throughout the country.”¹⁰⁴

In contrast to the lack of respect afforded to the first degree-holders, graduates of the *juren* and *jinshi* degrees were entitled to erect flagpoles with red and gold silk flags at their homes to advertise their achievements. By late Ming times, *gongsheng* also began displaying such status symbols. Local histories listed all these three categories of students, but ignored the *shengyuan*.

There are many stories, especially in Ming and Qing times, of strange occurrences in the exam halls, often supernatural, although these almost invariably relate to the provincial

¹⁰¹ Ho, op.cit., p. 34.

¹⁰² See Chung-li Chang *The Chinese Gentry: Studies on their role in nineteenth-century Chinese society* (part 2) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955) p. 172.

¹⁰³ Ho, op.cit., p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Ho, op.cit., p. 47.

examinations, rather than the higher levels.¹⁰⁵ Miyazaki suggests that the reason for this was “because the candidates were confined in the unnatural setting of the examination compound, away from the authority and police power of local officials. People believed that here alone was a place permitting revenge and that it was haunted by spirits determined to be avenged.”¹⁰⁶ Similar occurrences were almost unheard of at the palace exam level because: “Since this examination was held in the palace under the emperor’s personal auspices, undoubtedly ghosts were afraid to present themselves.”¹⁰⁷ It is possible that another factor was the disturbing nature of the provincial exam itself and the great pressures inherent in it, as the coming of age of the *tongsheng*.

Pu Songling’s own description of the psychological processes of the provincial exam candidate depicts phases of extreme nervousness, tantrums and shifting of blame:-

“When they take the provincial examination, the *xiucai* pass through seven likenesses. When they first enter, barefoot, and carrying their luggage, they are like beggars. When the roll call is read out and the officials and attendants shout and curse at them, they are like prisoners. When they go into their examination cells, and a row of heads poke out from the window holes, with a pair of feet protruding from each room, they are like a swarm of bees in the chill of late autumn. When they leave the compound, they are dejected, and their whole world is transformed. At this point they are like sick birds coming out of a cage. When they are waiting for the results, the grass and trees all cause alarm, and dreams and thoughts are all deceptive. When they imagine they have good news, then in an instant all the towers of success appear; if they imagine disappointment, then their skeleton rots away in a flash. At this juncture they are restless, whether walking around or sitting still, just like monkeys on a leash. Suddenly up gallops the messenger with the results. When someone’s name is not included on the list, his expression is transformed abruptly, to one of deathly despondency, like a fly, trapped with poisonous bait, completely unresponsive. When first frustrated in this way, he becomes completely depressed, then loudly curses the blindness of the examiners and the inadequacy of the pen ink, and is sure to burn everything on his desk. When burning proves not enough, he then smashes everything to smithereens. When smashing is still insufficient, he then throws it all into the muddy river. Thereafter he goes off to the mountains with disheveled hair to sit facing a cliff, thinking that if anyone dared approach him with essay titles again,

¹⁰⁵ See Miyazaki, op. cit., pp. 46, 67-8, and 95.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p 46.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p 95.

he would be sure to grab a weapon and chase him off. After a short while, that day becomes an increasingly distant memory and his anger gradually abates, and then he once again begins to get the itch to demonstrate his skill; he thus becomes like a pigeon whose eggs have been smashed, and can only begin to gather sticks and make an attempt to build a new nest.

In such a situation, while on the one hand the candidates are in great agony and want to die, the onlookers around them think this is all quite hilarious.”¹⁰⁸

Some of these feelings are evident in a *shi* poem Pu wrote for three of his sons, in 1702, towards the end of his life. He attempts to install in them a mixture of realism about the hardship they will face, a perseverance, although they may still be taking the children's exams well into adulthood, and an idealism, to work hard in spite of the harsh realities and injustices:-

“In past days the ‘children’s exams’ (*tongzi ke*) were taken by short-haired clean-shaven youths / Nowadays in the ‘children’s exams’ men are lined up like a long wall / In the past when someone passed the lowest level of the exams, they gloried in their understanding of the ancients / These days when they pass this stage, its value is discussed as a marketplace commodity / Although on the quota it says fifteen people, in fact there are only four or five / Even worse are the examiners, who are either mentally blinded, or physically so / Even if the writing is exceptional, they are still half-inclined to leave it up to destiny / Now faced with this dilemma, how can they hope to make their selection? / Slowly the months and the years go by, and these youngsters turn old and senile / If you are unable to endure three years of hard toil, then you’ll have a hundred years of misery / In the olden days when sages were over thirty, they were still in the ranks of the children / They were all still preparing for the exams and were completely immersed in this / Don’t worry about the world being unfair, worry about not working hard enough!”¹⁰⁹

Further reference is made to the link between the childlike aspects of these children's exams in a second poem written soon after this, in 1705, which again recalls Pu's experience with the *tongzi ke*, and refers to his ‘childish ignorance’ (*tongmeng* 童蒙) at this time.¹¹⁰ The use of such terms in these pieces stresses not only the hardship of the

¹⁰⁸ This description is appended to the *Liaozhai* tale Wang Zian 王子安 (6:65) about a candidate who falls into a delirium after taking the provincial exam.

¹⁰⁹ PSLQJ p. 1804, LZSJ *juan* 4, p.232.

¹¹⁰ PSLQJ p. 1858, LZSJ *juan* 4, p. 286.

early stages of the exam system, but also, I believe, a genuine implication and expectation of their childlike character.

- “No-one understands me”

Since these candidates’ status was perceived by society to be below that of an adult, it would not be surprising if they should equally experience some of the emotional frustrations and insecurities associated with those who, like adolescents, are on the fringes of the social world and have not yet been accepted into it.

The clearest indication of Pu Songling’s self-confessed motivations for writing the *Liaozhai* can be found in his preface to the tales, “The *Liaozhai*’s own record (*Liaozhai zizhi* 聊齋自志)”, written in 1679. This preface is notoriously problematic, not just because of the wealth of classical allusion, but also, as André Lévy points out, because of problems of dating.¹¹¹ As such, it has been discussed by many scholars¹¹² and has been described as “a masterpiece of parallel prose and a model of rhetoric and allusion,”¹¹³ “an intellectual *tour de force*,”¹¹⁴ and its beautiful style “the most perfect of its kind.”¹¹⁵ In addition to the literary skill displayed, the preface also presents us with some insight into what state of mind may have driven Pu Songling to compose the anthology.

One of the author’s childlike insecurities demonstrated in this preface is his feeling of being misunderstood, and his desperation to find someone who truly understands him. One of the major themes of the preface is Pu’s affirmation that there is nobody in the

¹¹¹ See André Lévy (Lei Wei An 雷威安)’s essay in Chinese “Man tan *Liaozhai zhiyi*: zizhi 漫談聊齋誌異：自誌” [A general discussion of the *Liaozhai*’s own record] in *Guoji Liaozhai lunwen ji* 國際聊齋論文集 [A collection of international papers on *Liaozhai*] Gu Meigao 辜美高 and Wang Zhizhong 王枝忠 (eds.) (Beijing: Beijing shifan xueyuan cbs, 1992) pp. 276-281.

¹¹² First translated into English by Herbert Giles in 1916 (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, pp. 12-15), a more reliable effort by Zeitlin (1993, op. cit., p.42, 43 and 48) has done much to alleviate some of the pitfalls for Western readers.

¹¹³ Zeitlin, p. 43.

¹¹⁴ Chang and Chang, p. 162.

¹¹⁵ Giles, p. xvi.

world who truly understands him.¹¹⁶ His closing sentence invokes Du Fu's famous poem of longing for his dead friend and fellow poet Li Bai,¹¹⁷ and suggests that he is entirely alone in the mortal world. "Are the only ones who know me 'in the green wood and at the dark frontier'?"¹¹⁸ This theme is very evident in Pu's other writings, some of which I will discuss below.

Such adolescent-type angst, a result of social exclusion, pervades Pu's writings. In a discussion of adolescence in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), Lucien Miller has demonstrated that the conflicting signals given to Jia Baoyu, at once indulged in the childhood fantasy world of the garden, and then beaten for overstepping the boundaries of adult moral orthodoxy, lead to a display of intense emotional instability. Miller suggests this is symptomatic of a treatment of this period as a time of illness.¹¹⁹ Handlin notes how the numerous discourses on illness among late Ming intellectuals filled an emotional need resulting from a perceived numbness and loss of direction which, she concludes, was one result of the rapidly changing society and, paradoxically, the fast-moving trends towards individualism.¹²⁰

Many of these phenomena seem symptomatic of an overwhelming loneliness on the part of intellectuals, which is often expressed in terms of being unable to find a confidante or a person who can truly understand them. Karl S.Y. Kao has already noted the fact that the desire for a true friend 'one who understands me' (a *zhiji* 知己) is actually a partial substitution for the need for recognition by the exam system. According to Kao, in Chinese tradition, the *zhiji* is "one of the most deeply felt and forceful needs for a

¹¹⁶ LZZY, p.30.

¹¹⁷ Zeitlin notes the allusion to Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-70) famous poem "Meng Li Bai 夢李白" (Dreaming of Li Bai). "When your soul came, the maple wood was green yet; When your soul returned, the frontier pass was dark with night. 魂來楓林青，魂返關塞黑" (*Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 [The Complete Tang poems] juan 218 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979] p. 2289) (cited and trans. in *Historian*, p. 51).

¹¹⁸ I have used Zeitlin's translation in *Historian*, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ See, pp. Miller's "Children of the Dream: The Adolescent World in Cao Xueqin's *Honglou meng*" in Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* 193-219.

¹²⁰ See Handlin, *Action in Late Ming Thought: The Reorientation of Lü K'un and Other Scholar-Officials* (California and London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 168-174.

member of the intelligentsia.”¹²¹ The statement from *The Historical Records* (*Shi ji* 史記) that “a scholar will die for his true friend (*shi wei zhiji zhe si* 士為知己者死)” was frequently referred to in late Ming writings.¹²² Indeed, as Zeitlin points out, the very structure of Pu Songling’s closing appeal in his preface reflects Confucius’ own outburst: “Is the only one who knows me in heaven?”¹²³

In a poem written for Yu Fangbo 喻方伯 on his departure, Pu states “If you have a true friend in the universe (*yu nei you zhiji* 宇內有知己), then a distance of 10 000 *li* is like a short corridor. I wish you success in your labours -- this separation is hardly worth such heartbreak!”¹²⁴ This idea of true friendship defying distance is a reworking of two lines by Wang Bo 王勃 (649?-675?) “If a true friend exists within the four seas, it is as if the ends of the universe are right next-door (*hainei cun zhiji, tianya ruo bilin* 海內存知己，天涯若比鄰)”¹²⁵ and is a common trope in poetry about friends parting. It also underlines the importance attached to such a relationship, in a society which is sometimes assumed to be based purely on familial structures.

The powerful nature of this kind of friendship is also underscored in *Liaozhai* tales such as “Liancheng” 連城 (2:40) in which the male protagonist, Scholar Qiao, decides that Liancheng is his true *zhiji*, when she responds favourably to one of his poems. At this he becomes devoted to her and then cuts off some of his own flesh to help cure her. Later, he declares he is happy to die after she smiles at him, because, he says “Liancheng is someone who really understands me (*Liancheng zhen zhi wo zhe* 連城真知我者!)” Although eventually they do have a sexual relationship and get married, the initial

¹²¹ Kao, op. cit, p. 216.

¹²² This line originally occurs in the “Cike liezhuan 刺客列傳” chapter of the *Shiji*. Pu Songling himself cites it in comments appended to the *Liaozhai* tale “Liancheng” (連城; 2:40) discussed below.

¹²³ From *The Analects* 14:35. Cited in *Historian*, p. 51.

¹²⁴ “Song Yu Fangbo” 送喻方伯 [Seeing off Yu Fangbo], PSLQJ p. 1762.

¹²⁵ From “Song Du Shaofu zhi ren Shuchuan” 送杜少府之任蜀川 [Sending off Official Du to take up a post in Sichuan].

motivation for Qiao is less a physical attraction, but rather this quest for a partner who can understand him.¹²⁶

While it is clear the value which Pu, in keeping with Chinese tradition, places on true friendship, the tragedy for him is that his search for genuine understanding continued throughout his life. The poem “A Whim” (*Ou gan* 偶感), written in 1688, is one of the clearest depictions of Pu Songling’s overriding regret that he has no such true friend, a regret which surpasses his disappointment at the failure of his career. He describes his frustration with the examinations, but ends the poem: “What I hate in this life is not having a true friend (*ci sheng suo hen wu zhiji* 此生所恨無知己), never gaining a name for myself is not reason enough for sorrow.”¹²⁷

The *Liaozhai* tale “Scholar Ye” (*Yesheng* 葉生; 1:31) has been described as the most autobiographical in content,¹²⁸ and subtly combines the two main themes, of desire for success in the exam system and the need for loyal friendship and understanding. The eponymous protagonist is extremely talented, but continually fails to gain a place in the roll of honour at the examinations. However, he is greatly admired by the local district magistrate, Ding Chenghe, who helps him financially and invites him to move in to the *yamen* to study. He takes the exam, Ding reads his paper and sees that it is excellent, but still Ye does not pass and becomes very despondent.

At this point in the story the themes of the personal friend, who does show Ye recognition, and the impersonal examination system, which refuses to, are contrasted for the first time. Although Ding holds an official post, and is therefore a representative of the success which Ye aspires to, his recognition is shown, at this stage, to be insufficient comfort for Ye.

¹²⁶ This ambivalent attitude towards sex is a feature of many *Liaozhai* protagonists, a phenomenon I discuss in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹²⁷ PSLQJ p. 1723, LZSJ *juan* 2, p. 151.

¹²⁸ This view was first articulated by Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒, in a commentary written in 1818, published in 1891.

Ding tries to console him and they arrange to go to the capital together, as soon as Ding's tenure expires. Ye returns home, stays indoors and becomes ill. Meanwhile, Ding has some disagreements with his superiors and loses his job. He writes to Ye to say he is now free to go, Ye says he is too ill to make the journey and urges his friend to go on ahead, but Ding insists on waiting for him. They go together to Ding's home and meet his son who takes Ye as his tutor. He is a very bright boy who, with the help of his father's contacts, gained the *xiucaï* degree very easily. Having read all of Ye's own essays, he gains second place in the provincial exam. When Ding expresses his regret that Ye himself never gained this honour, Ye replies that it is his destiny, adding that to have found such a good friend is better than to have won glory in the exams.

If the story ended here, it would perhaps have been a more convincing comment that Pu Songling also felt that, in the end, friendship was of more value than exam success. However, in order to complete the narrative successfully, Pu allows his protagonist to win the acclaimed prize, if only in the afterlife.

Ding is anxious that Ye should go home to take the annual qualifying exam, but Ye seems uninterested, so Ding tells his son to buy Ye a *xiucaï* degree while he is in the capital taking the palace exam. Ding's son becomes a *jinshi* and then Ye passes the provincial exam and becomes a *juren*. Accompanied by young Ding, Ye returns home for the first time in three years, glorying in their success in the exams. But when Ye reaches his house, everything is desolate and his wife screams at the sight of him. She tells him he's been dead for some time, but they couldn't afford to bury his corpse. She begs him not to haunt them. Ye goes into the bedroom, sees his coffin and vanishes, leaving his exam robes behind. His family tells Ding, who pays for the funeral and also for Ye's son's schooling. One year later, Ye's son gains the *xiucaï* degree.

The parallels between this tale and the biographical details of Pu's own life are self-evident, and the ending in which the candidate's dreams of success are fulfilled in the afterlife is a neat consummation of Pu's own ambitions. I believe the tale also underlines

the high value Pu placed on the need for recognition. On a public level, his repeated failure at the exams was a constant negation of this. On a more personal level, he appears to have never felt able to find genuine understanding even among his peers. Despite the loyalty of his many acquaintances from among Shandong's literary circles, his high ideals of true friendship seemed, in his eyes, never completely satisfied.

- The tradition of psychological release through writing

In the final three lines of the preface, Pu states that the writing of these tales is a psychological release for him, of his pent-up lonely frustration (*gufen* 孤憤), a reference to the chapter of the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 which rails against the corrupt officials of the age, bemoaning the inability of ordinary people to progress in society because of them, and the apparent blindness of the emperor to the situation.¹²⁹ The word *gu*, with the child radical, originally referred to an orphan child, and this then came to represent the ultimate form of loneliness. *Fen* suggests anger, or indignation. The main reason for this 'lonely frustration', was Pu Songling's repeated failure to advance within the civil service examination system.

In this way, Pu is identifying himself with another tradition in Chinese literature, that of venting feelings through writing. Even in modern times, Lucien Pye has argued, repressed aggression is a symptom of Chinese society, where notions of strict didacticism, conformity and filial subservience act as a strait jacket for expression of emotion, in contrast to western societies, where the repressed impulse is more usually of a sexual nature.¹³⁰ Another side to this debate is presented by the Taiwanese scholar, Wang Yijia 王溢嘉, who argues that Confucianist doctrine has functioned in a less repressive way than Christianity in the West, and that this is reflected in the manner in which the

¹²⁹ The title of the eleventh chapter of the *Han Feizi* is "Gu fen 孤憤."

¹³⁰ See Lucien Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Mass: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain, 1981) p 137.

supernatural is portrayed within the two literary traditions.¹³¹ It may be the case that creative writers were one of the few groups within these restrictive social conditions, fortunate enough to be able to vent their pent-up feelings.

The orthodox ideal in ancient China was that all writing should be motivated by didacticism, a desire to “educate by reward and punishment (*chengquan jiaohua* 懲勸教化)”. Gan Bao, for example, in the preface to his third century collection *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushenji* 搜神記), explicitly stated that his purpose in writing was to “make clear the spirit way, and not to deceive.” However, there was also a long sub-culture in China of disheartened scholars who wrote for self-comfort and psychological release, a process commonly known as venting anger (*xie fen* 泄憤).

Writers as far back as Qu Yuan 屈原 (c.340-278 BC) had claimed this method of release as his reason for writing when he wrote of being able to “vent his indignation by expressing his feelings (*fa fen yi shu qing* 發憤以抒情).”¹³² According to legend Qu, a loyal retainer to the king, was slandered by a rival and banished to the far south of the state of Chu. He eventually committed suicide in protest at his mistreatment, by drowning himself in the Miluo 汨羅 river. In the influential and popular *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 后漢書) it was claimed that he “steadfastly conducted himself in loyalty and truth while being calumniated and vilified. In his grief and confusion he did not know what to do and so composed *Li Sao* 離騷”.¹³³ So many seventeenth-century writers invoked Qu Yuan as a paragon of virtuous conduct under troubled times, that his name had almost become synonymous with the ideal of steadfast loyalty and the sorrow which it brings. Pu Songling is no exception to this, comparing himself to Qu Yuan in the opening line of his preface.

¹³¹ See Wang Yijia, “Yuwang jiaoxiangqu: *Liaozhai* hu yao gushi de xinlixue tansuo” 欲望交響曲：聊齋狐妖故事的心理探索 [A Symphony of Desire: a psychological approach to the *Liaozhai* tales of foxes and demons] in *Guoji Liaozhai Lunwen Ji*, pp. 214-216.

¹³² This line appears in the first poem of the 4th *juan* of “The nine declarations” of Qu Yuan 屈原’s *Chuci* 楚詞 [Lyrics of Chu]. See *Guoxue jiben congshu sibaizhong* 國學基本叢書四百種, (Guoji) (ed. by Wang Yunwu) Vol. no. 217, p. 54 (Taipei; Shangwu yinshu guan, 1968).

¹³³ This reference and its translation, are cited in foot-note 44, p. 648 of Frederic Wakeman Jr.’s article “Romantics, Stoics and Martyrs”, *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. XLIII, no. 4 (August 1984), pp. 631-665.

While the focus of the chapter of *Han Feizi* entitled “Gu fen” is on social problems of the day, the term was later cited by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145 - c.85 BC) in a literary context. Sima Qian, whose biography of Qu Yuan is the only available source on the poet’s life, led a life of similarly frustrated ambition. Also unfairly accused of disloyalty to his emperor, Sima Qian was imprisoned before he had finished writing *The Historical Records* and chose to be castrated rather than commit suicide, so that he could finish this task which had been entrusted to him by his late father on his deathbed. In a letter written some years later, Sima Qian explains “the reason I bear these insults and continue to live, hidden in filth without taking my leave, is that I grieve that I have things in my heart which I have not been able to express fully, and I am shamed that I might die and my writings not be known to later generations.”¹³⁴ In the final chapter of the *Shiji*, “The Self-Introduction of the Grand Historian”, he lists various writers he identifies with, all of whom have suffered some kind of wrong, including Confucius, Qu Yuan, Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, the blind disciple of Confucius to whom the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語 are attributed, and Sunzi 孫子. He adds “When Lü Buwei 呂不韋 was exile in Shu 蜀 he wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; when Han Feizi was imprisoned by the state of Qin 秦 he spoke of his impossible ‘lonely frustration’ (*gufen*). Most of the three hundred poems in the Classic of Poetry were created by the sages releasing their indignation (*fafen zhi suo wei zuo* 發憤之所為作).” Sima Qian notes that “These people all had pent-up ambitions yet were unable to follow their chosen paths.”¹³⁵

Another proponent of voicing perceived injustices was the Tang dynasty prose writer Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) who famously wrote “all creatures who do not receive fair treatment will exclaim (*da fan wu bu de qi ping ze ming* 大凡物不得其平則鳴).” This motivation for writing, usually referred to as ‘speaking out because of injustice (*bu ping ze ming*)’ became an acceptable alternative to the didacticism still favoured by the more orthodox literati.

¹³⁴ Cited and translated by Stephen Durrant in his entry on Sima Qian in the ICTCL p. 722.

¹³⁵ Sima Qian *Shiji* (xia) ce 20 juan 130 (ch. 70 of Guoji edition, pp. 63-4).

By the middle of the Ming dynasty, the so called 'theory of venting anger' (*xie fen shuo* 泄憤說) had already become incorporated into literary theory, notably by Li Zhi who, in his "Miscellaneous sayings" (*zashuo* 雜說) openly opposed the cherished tradition of a vocational calling to didactic scholarship. He declared: "None of the true writers of the world originally set out to be writers, but rather as if they had all kinds of formless strange things in their hearts, as if they had something caught in their throat that they wanted to but dare not cough out; their speech is also always full of places where things which cannot be said are said."¹³⁶

The idea of something choking a person in their throat has been picked up by the twentieth century Marxist critic Zhang Zhenjun 張振軍, as representative of a kind of repressed grievance common at this time: "The indignation felt by the Ming literati, was in fact a kind of human despair resulting from a widespread feeling of spiritual oppression, an opposition to and an outcry against repression by Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism and contemporary social ills."¹³⁷ Zhang argues that this phenomenon is related to the economic and intellectual conditions of the time, and suggests that the promotion of popular literary forms by the figures in the left wing of the Wang school is inseparable from their championing of this tradition of venting frustration: "In this way, fiction and drama, these literary art forms that the orthodox feudal literati would consider worthless, came to represent a powerful weapon for the new urban class of intellectuals in the fight against the feudal powers, and so were vigorously promoted by them. Although they were not against using fiction and drama for educational purposes, they were more interested in using them to vent their anger and frustration, to express true emotions, delivering a severe blow to the model of *chengquan jiaohua*."¹³⁸

¹³⁶ *Li Zhi Wenji* 李贄文集 [The collected writings of Li Zhi] edited by Zhang Jianye 張建業 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian cbs, 2000) [LZWJ], Vol. 1, *Fen Shu* 焚書 [A Book to be burned]: *juan 3* "Zashuo" 雜說 [Miscellaneous sayings] p. 91.

¹³⁷ Zhang Zhenjun, *Chuantong xiaoshuo yu Zhongguo wenhua* 傳統小說與中國文化 [Traditional fiction and Chinese culture], (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue cbs, 1996), p.80.

¹³⁸ Zhang Zhenjun, op. cit, pp. 75-6.

Yuan Hongdao袁宏道 (1568-1610) in the conclusion of his biography of Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), describes vividly and in great detail how Xu hacked off his own head with an axe, giving voice to his frustration. He ends the account of Xu's death with the comment "Thus Wenzhang 文長 [Xu Wei] unable to fulfil his ambition at this time, died with his heart full of anger (*bao fen er zu* 抱憤而卒)."¹³⁹ For these intellectuals, releasing their pent-up emotions was preferable to suppressing them, and creative writing was one of the few channels open to them.

Li Zhi took this further and declared that any writing which was not grounded in this type of frustration was worthless: "The ancient worthies and sages did not write unless they were exasperated. To write without being exasperated is like trembling without being cold and groaning without being sick."¹⁴⁰ On a more practical level, Karl S.Y. Kao notes that an additional factor for the expression of protest through fictional writings was that there was no official channel through which a failed candidate could appeal, even if faced with blatant corruption or unfairness on the part of the examiners.¹⁴¹

The existence of this tradition of very self-conscious projection of a writer's psychological condition into his work and even, by late Ming times, the emergence of a body of thought advocating that this was indeed the only justification for writing, seems to give some legitimacy for critics who wish to cross the boundary between author and text. If it is accepted that true literature can and should only flow from an anguished state of mind then I believe we should consider a more flexible approach towards the separation of the writer from his writings.

¹³⁹ "Yuan Zhonglang wenchao: Xu Wenzhang zhuan 袁中郎文鈔徐文長傳" [Copies by Yuan Hongdao: the story of Xu Wenzhang] in *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* 袁中郎全集 [The complete works of Yuan Hongdao] (Hong Kong: Guang zhi shuju cbs, 1935) p.2.

¹⁴⁰ LZWJ *Fen shu*: juan 3 "Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan xu" 忠義水滸傳序 [The preface to the *Loyalty and Righteousness edition of the Water Margin*] p. 101, cited and translated by Handlin, op.cit. p 170.

¹⁴¹ see Karl S.Y. Kao, op.cit., p. 213.

- Conclusion

In any competitive society, failure, especially recurrent failure, is bound to result in some degree of depression. Within a Confucian society, a man's life and his progression through it were gauged and numerically defined by various imposed structures. In the spheres of medicine, schooling, and both moral and physical development there seemed to be an almost obsessive need to enumerate progress in accordance with age. The very terminology used to denote the various stages of one's development reflected this impulse, and this was particularly true with the examination system. In late imperial China, and perhaps in the early Qing dynasty more than at any other time, the nature of the exam system was so structured that to be locked within it, particularly at the level of a *shengyuan*, meant a continual struggle. Attempting to retain the *status quo* was not an option, since regular participation in the exams was a requirement to avoid demotion. To give up would mean to reject the whole ethos of being for a true Confucian, yet to continue to attempt, and fail, at the provincial level meant to be constantly reminded of one's status as 'unestablished' and therefore an incomplete member of society.

The progression from *shengyuan* to *juren* was the main focus of over fifty years of Pu Songling's life. Throughout this time, one of Pu's great regrets was that he lacked a friend who truly understood him. A greater regret, however, was that his talent and originality, recognised in the early exams, appeared incompatible with the requirements for provincial level and above. It was as if Pu was unable, or unwilling, to adapt his ideas to the greater conformity and conventionality required in those exams which would have qualified him for officialdom. For Pu, the creative writing process was the only available means to give voice to this loneliness and indignation.

As a result of the extraordinary social pressures on provincial level candidates, and particularly on those candidates who repeatedly resat the exam, a sizable sector of aspiring literati found themselves dismissed by their 'established' peers. In this chapter, I have attempted to draw a parallel between this aspect of Pu's life and a period of

adolescence, of waiting, often with frustration, to become a fully functioning and accepted member of society. Since being excessively focussed and single-minded can be representative of an infantile state of mind,¹⁴² then perhaps it is natural that, when the focus of one's obsession is obstructed successively by an external force, and when one is stuck within a structure as hierarchical as the civil service examination system, adolescent-type emotions such as intense frustration, loneliness, and a yearning to be understood, should occur.

Pu claimed that the *Liaozhai* tales served as an outlet for his loneliness and indignation. The contradictions inherent in his position, refusing to abandon his quest for success in officialdom, yet equally refusing to give up his idealism, his love of the strange and non-conventional and his inability to conform to his surroundings are, I believe, also reflected in his writings. In the rest of this thesis, I will examine childlike aspects of Pu's works, within the context of the idealisation of the child and childlikeness by many sixteenth and seventeenth century literati.

¹⁴² The significance of such single-mindedness as indicative of a childlike mind is discussed in the study of folly (*chi* 痴) in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Chapter 3 ~ The cult of the child

During the Ming and Qing periods, a large number of scholars were, like Pu Songling, effectively immobilised by the examination system and thus, stuck within the ranks of the 'child-scholars', became gradually disenfranchised from society. Conflicts between ideals and reality are particularly prevalent in the writings of this time as individuals either chose to or else were forced to reject orthodox career paths. At the same time, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the development of a trend, the roots of which had been established in pre-imperial times, which led to what has been described as 'the late-Ming cult of the child'.¹⁴³ Factors such as the seemingly unstoppable trends towards syncretism of the three traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (*san jiao heyi* 三教合一),¹⁴⁴ together with the hugely popular doctrines of the Wang Yangming school, contributed to trends of spontaneity, romanticism and idealism of the late Ming period. These culminated in the late Ming discourse on the idealisation of childlikeness, advocated most definitively by Li Zhi in his influential essay on the childlike mind (*tongxin shuo* 童心說).

In this chapter, I will first examine some Chinese concepts of childhood, and then trace the evolution of the idealisation of the child, before considering Li Zhi's essay in full. In my study of the childlike mind, I will broaden my analysis to include other contemporary ideological trends, which I believe can also be read within the context of a childlike consciousness. Finally I will consider the extent of influence of these ideas within the literary circles of the late Ming and early Qing.

- Chinese attitudes to childhood

Before attempting to analyse the concept of a childlike mind (*tongxin*), I will first undertake a brief discussion of some Chinese notions of childhood and attitudes towards

¹⁴³ See, for example, Pei-yi Wu, "Childhood remembered: Parents and Children in China, 800-1700" in Kinney (ed.) *Chinese Views of Childhood* (pp. 129-157).

¹⁴⁴ See below for discussion of Buddhist influences on late Ming Confucian thought.

children. I will first use some of what limited resources are available to consider attitudes to and treatment of children and infants in premodern China. Childhood in China is a topic which has been much neglected until the last decade or so, and many conclusions in this respect must therefore be drawn as much from what is not available or is omitted as from what we can find.¹⁴⁵ One of the reasons for this neglect is the lack of primary sources. An obvious source of information would be the official biographies, but Kenneth Dewoskin notes that early Chinese historians showed little interest in childhood events, although the unofficial biographies tended to give slightly more detail. While the childhoods of very exceptional figures (often emperors) are also notable, these records are unreliable sources for a study of Chinese attitudes to childhood *per se* since, in Dewoskin's words, "for the vast majority of exemplary figures whose lives make up the bulk of Chinese history writing, they achieve what they do by pursuing a life of study and learning of the sanctioned corpus of knowledge and practice, building on a foundation of inborn talent. For these historical figures, what the historian needs to tell and the reader needs to know does not encompass the child."¹⁴⁶

According to traditional Chinese pediatrics, an infant had to pass through eighteen cycles, each of thirty two days during which both physical organs and mental consciousness developed. It was only after the whole transition period of 576 days that the stage of infancy (*ying'er* 嬰兒) was complete, and the child became a full person (*chengren* 成人).¹⁴⁷ As Furth warns though, according to the medical textbooks, "even here the humanity of the toddler is linked to skills, emotions, and cognitive faculties, and is not expressed in moral terms. Nor is there any infant innocence and purity."¹⁴⁸ In a study of wet-nurses in early imperial China, Jen-der Lee cites a Sui dynasty physiognomy text, the

¹⁴⁵ Of the sources which are available, I refer extensively below to the conference volume edited by Anne Behnke Kinney, entitled *Chinese Views of Childhood*. Otherwise, sociological and anthropological studies, such as Stafford (1995) and Waltner (1994) provide some useful insights, and some feminist scholars have dealt with specific issues such as infanticide, foot-binding and adoption. In addition, some reconstructed memoirs of Chinese childhood by twentieth century writers, eg. Pruitt (1978), Saari (1990), are useful sources.

¹⁴⁶ See Dewoskin, "Famous Chinese Childhoods" in Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* (pp. 57-79) p. 76.

¹⁴⁷ See Furth's "Concepts of Pregnancy," pp.7-35.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Chanjing 產經, which states categorically that a baby's "emotions and spirits are affected by nothing but milk,"¹⁴⁹ and this therefore underlines the need for extreme care in selecting a suitable wet-nurse for your child. It would seem that, at this stage, the outside environment was a far less influential factor in pediatric development. However, as is often the case, the view of the medical establishment was not all-pervasive in society and debates on childhood and infancy were not necessarily premised by this clear-cut delineation.

From a social perspective, Wu Hung notes two definitions of 'child' in early China: one simply according to age, and one centred around one's family relationships. Wu cites the saying popular in early imperial times, that "As long as his parents are alive, a son is always a boy." He suggests intriguingly that while the practice of filiality is both an identification of oneself as a child and an affirmation of the parental role,¹⁵⁰ it also serves as a signal to others of one's maturity, since "when a child was labeled 'filial', even if he was only five years old, he had in a certain sense gained adulthood; he had become both a symbol of the most fundamental moral principle and an exemplar for the whole population. As this notion gained acceptance, a whole group of child-men emerged in both fiction and reality."¹⁵¹ This idea of a filial child who is somehow exempt from the ageing process is also exemplified in the well known Zhou Dynasty model of filial piety, old Laizi 老萊子, who did not lose his child's heart, and deliberately continued to act like a child until he was seventy, for the virtuous aim of preventing his parents from realising how old they themselves were.¹⁵² As this anecdote suggests, boundaries between childhood and adulthood are simultaneously clearly defined and indistinguishable.

The constant which underpins all Confucian doctrines concerning man's physical, social, and ethical development is that of education. Liu Xiang 刘向 (ca. 80-7 BC), the presumed

¹⁴⁹ See Jen-der Lee's "Wet Nurses in Early Imperial China" in *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* (Vol. 2, no. 1, 2000), pp. 1-39.

¹⁵⁰ Wu Hung, "Private Love and Public Duty" in Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* (pp. 79-111), p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Wu Hung, p. 101.

¹⁵² This story is recorded in both the *Xiaozi zhuan* 孝子傳 [Biographies of filial sons] in *Elementary studies Chuxue ji* 初學記, vol. 17 and the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 [Biographies of exemplary women].

author of the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳), left some very influential writings on infant education, particularly in the section of the *Lienü zhuan* entitled the “Biographies of Maternal Paragons” (*Muyi zhuan* 母儀傳) in which he emphasised the vital importance of education in very early childhood (including the prenatal stage) and the crucial role of mothers in the child’s moral development.¹⁵³ One of the most well-known stories from the children’s textbook the *Three Character Classic* (*San zi jing* 三字經), which was originally related in the *Lienü zhuan*, concerns Mencius’ mother, who decides to move house three times, in an attempt to provide her young son with positive influences in his childhood. The fact that this woman’s decisive action has been continually lauded throughout history, is due to a tacit understanding that the content of a child’s play is determined by his environment and that fundamental to a child’s nature is the desire to imitate the adults around him.¹⁵⁴

In Han times, the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) was the first school text, since it only comprises 388 different characters. This led the way in the inculcation of the Confucian ethical standards of filial piety and duty over childish fantasy and desire. In later ages texts such as the *Three Character Classic* and the *Twenty Four Models of Filial Piety* (*Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝) bombarded children from their earliest days with tales of the virtues of self-sacrifice within the bonds of the family. There was a generally accepted doctrine that public duty was to be valued above personal love, with anecdotes praising virtuous mothers who sacrificed their own children for the sake of a step-child.¹⁵⁵

The responsibility for a child’s development did not lie wholly with his parents, however, and it was imperative that the child himself was made aware of the duties inherent in the process of growing up. Jon Saari opens the preface to his *Legacies of Childhood: growing up Chinese in a time of crisis, 1890-1920*, with a discussion on the ancient Chinese

¹⁵³ Kinney, “Dyed Silk”, p. 27 Liu Xiang’s ideas on fetal instruction (*taijiao* 胎教) were based on what Kinney translates as ‘simulative transformation’ (*xiaohua* 消化).

¹⁵⁴ Despite the arguments for the importance of environmental influence on children, however, it is noteworthy that the sage emperor Shun 舜, an ultimate model of human virtue, came from a particularly undesirable family background. See Dewoskin, “Famous Chinese Childhoods” p. 65.

¹⁵⁵ See Wu Hung, pp. 88-90.

concept which he translates as ‘the struggle to be fully human’ (*zuo ren* 做人). “It pointed to a pathway trod by millions of Chinese youngsters who upon reaching the age of six or seven years were exhorted by nurses, parents, and elders to *cheng ren*, to become human, to realize their nature, to bring their innate humanity to expression and completion.”¹⁵⁶

According to the early Qing scholar Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1652-1725), the means to achieve this full humanity was set out in Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200)’s primer on elementary education (*xiaoxue* 小學). In his preface to this influential primer, Zhang declares:-

“Before Confucius there was no book for adult learning (*daxue* 大學); after Confucius created one, the gateway to virtue existed. Before Zhu Xi there was no book for elementary learning (*xiaoxue*); after Zhu Xi wrote one the way to become fully human existed.”¹⁵⁷

In this way, children were seen as embarking on a fixed path towards full adulthood, by methodically following set texts, in a way similar to that of the examination candidates discussed in the last chapter.

In later imperial times, the main sources of information about children can be found either in poetry, or in mourning rituals for children. Pei-yi Wu links the sudden abundance of literature mourning dead children with what he calls the ‘cult of the child’ which began in the late Ming.¹⁵⁸ There were also strict divisions, which had been laid down in the *Yili* 儀禮, (ca. 1st C. AD) dividing mourning for children into *zhangshang* 長殤 for teenagers of sixteen *sui* or older; *zhongshang* 中殤 for those between twelve and fifteen; and *xiashang* 下殤 for children between eight and eleven. There was no public ceremony for the under eights, only private grief, with the number of days of a mourning period

¹⁵⁶ See Jon L. Saari’s *Legacies of Childhood: Growing up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990) preface, p. vii.

¹⁵⁷ Cited and translated in Saari, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁸ Pei-yi Wu, “Childhood Remembered”, pp. 146-8.

corresponding to the number of months of the child's life (although if the infant was less than three months old, and so had not yet been named, even this ritual was denied).

More evidence of this official view of the relative worthlessness of the very young can be seen in the levity of the penalties prescribed in the Ming and Qing penal codes for unreasonably killing one's own child. Ann Waltner notes that a typical sentence for such a crime would be sixty strokes with a heavy stick and a year in prison, since "destroying an infant, however reprehensible the act may be, is not equivalent to murder because the infant still resides in a liminal state."¹⁵⁹ If the death resulted from an overly harsh beating for disobedience on the part of the child, no matter the circumstances, the only penalty given was one hundred strokes. If the death was an accident, then the parent was immune from punishment. Geoffrey MacCormack traces the history of such punishments, and notes that by the Ming and Qing periods the penalties for child cruelty were generally far lighter than in earlier times, while the penalty on the child for lack of filiality was actually more severe. "The most marked phenomenon in law is that a parent was treated with extreme leniency for harm or injury inflicted on a child, even where the harm was deliberately inflicted, whereas a child was treated with great severity in respect of any harm caused a parent, even through an inadvertent act."¹⁶⁰

The paramount importance of this virtue of filial piety led to a situation where children could be undervalued and mistreated within the context of the family. Hsiung Ping-chen has looked at the role of the mother, in the often very intentional construction of an emotional bond with her child, in a survey of over eight hundred biographical and autobiographical accounts from the Ming and Qing dynasties. She suggests that, due to social realities and gender imbalances, a mother's only option was to be somewhat emotionally manipulative and to create a situation whereby sons were never allowed to forget her sacrifice for them, and were even made to identify themselves with their

¹⁵⁹ Waltner, "Infanticide and Dowry in Ming and Early Qing China", in *Chinese Views of Childhood* (pp. 193 - 219), p. 196.

¹⁶⁰ Geoffrey MacCormack, *The Spirit of Traditional Chinese Law* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 78-9.

mother in her suffering. Hsiung concludes that this experience, which began in early childhood, had a strong psychological influence on the adult life of many Chinese men.¹⁶¹ In sum, the realities of life for children in premodern China seem somewhat to belie the philosophical idealisation of the child. In the available sources, the child is rarely seen as a person in his own right. In these writings a child is either seen primarily as a participant in a family relationship, who is judged according to his performance of filial obligations, or else as an unformed adult whose potential can only be properly exploited by strict discipline and education. In what follows, I will trace the development of the constructed ideal of childlikeness eulogised by many sixteenth and seventeenth century Chinese literati.

- The tradition of the mind ~ a brief overview

Li Zhi is usually described as an extremist member of the so-called left wing of the Wang Yangming School of the Mind, which was at its most influential in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before examining ideological constructs of childlikeness such as those promoted by Li, I will briefly outline some of the background to the Wang school to which he was affiliated.

It is no coincidence that the late Ming was a period of intense debate about the nature of the mind, since this in itself fuelled the debate on the nature of childhood: to discuss whether the mind is inherently good or evil requires one to take a stand on the nature of infancy itself. Equally, childhood can either be upheld as a time of innocence, sincerity and spontaneity or despised as a transitional period of incompleteness, ignorance of propriety, lack of self-control, and one which is replete with danger.

Taking analysis of the mind and human nature as the starting point for the achievement of the ideal of sagehood is typical of orthodox Neo-Confucianism. Where Wang Yangming

¹⁶¹ Hsiung Ping-chen, "Constructed Emotions: The Bond between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China", in *Late Imperial China* Vol. 15, No. 1 (June 1994), pp. 87-117.

differs from the previous Cheng-Zhu school, however, is in his conclusions, rather than his methodology.

Debates concerning the nature of the heart and mind (*xin* 心) can be traced back to pre-imperial China. Mencius believed that everyone had four *xin*, one of compassion, one of shame, one of reverence and one of right and wrong.¹⁶² He analysed these further, saying that the *xin* of compassion marks the beginning of human-kindness (*ren* 仁), the *xin* of shame marks the beginning of propriety (*yi* 義), the *xin* of reverence marks the beginning of ceremony (*li* 禮) and that of right and wrong marks the beginning of wisdom (*zhi* 智)¹⁶³ and later he specifies that these four virtues are all rooted in the *xin*.¹⁶⁴

The eternal debate which has been a major preoccupation of philosophers the world over, that of the relative importance of mind and human nature, led during the early Song period to the development of two schools of thought: *lixue* (the study of laws or principles) and *xinxue* (the study of the mind), generally represented by the Cheng-Zhu school and the Lu-Wang school respectively.

The philosophers usually credited with initiating the Song Neo-Confucian revival are two brothers, Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-85) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1108). They were influenced by both Buddhist and Daoist traditions but, as students of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), friends of Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077), and nephews of Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077), they were in a powerful position to begin the process of synthesising *Yijing* 易經 cosmology with the ancient Confucian moral code. Although the two brothers were not themselves proposing separate schools, it is generally acknowledged that Cheng Yi's teachings, in conjunction with the later developments by Zhu Xi, were the main basis for the *Lixue* school, whereas Cheng Hao's teachings had the most influence on Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139-1191), whose ideas were later developed by Wang Yangming within the traditions of the *Xinxue* school.

¹⁶² See *Mencius* 孟子 Gaozi Zhangju shang 告子章句上, no. 6.

¹⁶³ See *Mencius* 孟子 Gongsun Chou Zhangju shang 公孫丑章句上, no. 6.

¹⁶⁴ See *Mencius* 孟子 Jinxin Zhangju shang 盡心章句上, no. 21.

Zhu Xi insisted that the mind was a single entity, but was separate from one's nature (*xing* 性). In his *Treatise on the Examination of the Mind* he stated, "The mind is that with which man rules his body. It is one and not a duality, is subject and not object, and controls the external world instead of being controlled by it. Therefore, if we examine external objects with the mind, their principles will be apprehended."¹⁶⁵ Lu Jiuyuan rejected this and argued that the mind encompassed not only the nature, but also all the principles of the universe (*li* 理).¹⁶⁶ Wang Yangming states definitively that the substance (*ti* 體) of one's *xin* is one's nature (*xing* 性) and this nature is principle (*li* 理).¹⁶⁷

In the early Ming, the government was characterised by conservative conformism, but many scholars, began to shift their interest from questions of cosmology and metaphysics, to concentrate on self-cultivation instead. Free-thinking intellectuals were no longer interested in the intellectual orthodoxy now that it had lost much of its moral force and had become, in the eyes of many, excessively formalistic and decadent.¹⁶⁸ *Xinxue* doctrines thus gained greater influence. Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428-1500) stressed the importance of naturalness and quiescence, challenging Zhu Xi while not directly endorsing Lu Jiuyuan. His teachings in turn formed the basis for Wang Yangming's development of Lu's doctrines. Often referred to simply as *Wangxue* 王學, this group of doctrines became the major philosophical force in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was championed particularly by the growing number of intellectuals who felt excluded from officialdom.

The Cheng-Zhu school (*Lixue*) was preferable to dynastic rulers since it was not extremist, and advocated respect for authority, and self-cultivation through study of the

¹⁶⁵ I have used Wing-tsit Chan's translation, in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 602.

¹⁶⁶ This stress on the all-inclusive nature of the mind, was one of the defining characteristics of the Neo-Confucian tradition which came to be known as the School of the Mind (*xin xue*). I will explore these ideas more in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁷ *Wang Wencheng Gong quanshu (shang) juan 5* p. 39, trans. in Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 94.

¹⁶⁸ See Wing-tsit Chan's introduction to his translation of Wang Yangming's philosophy, *Instructions*, p. 20.

past. The individualism and antiestablishment ideas of the *Xinxue* school must have seemed dangerous to rulers in the Yuan and early Ming and this is a major factor why Lu Jiuyuan's doctrines were relatively neglected during these centuries, while the *lixue* school was held in great esteem and officially endorsed by the state.¹⁶⁹

Wang Yangming is described in the official Ming history (*Ming Shi* 明史) as having the greatest military achievements of any civil official during the dynasty, demonstrating his willingness to participate in government in his early career.¹⁷⁰ He had long been a sceptic of Cheng-Zhu doctrines: in his youth he had once sat facing some bamboo for seven consecutive days, trying in vain to discern the principles (*li*) within it. However, after his banishment to Guizhou, he is said to have undergone a kind of enlightenment, similar to the Chan Buddhist experience and decided that "those who seek principles in things are mistaken".¹⁷¹ After his enlightenment, Wang proceeded to rearrange Lu Jiuyuan's doctrines of the unity of mind and nature, and the presence of the universal *li* within an individual's mind.

In contrast to the Cheng-Zhu scholars' belief in the supremacy of principle, Wang emphasized the supremacy (*zhuzaixing* 主宰性) of the *xin*, considering the former view to be self-centred and therefore immoral.¹⁷² Wang points out that the *xin* is the impetus for all sensory faculties.¹⁷³

It is Wang's definition of the mind that caused much of the later controversy linking his school with the weakening of Neo-Confucianism and the demise of the Ming dynasty.

¹⁶⁹ Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1975) p.373.

¹⁷⁰ This evaluation is appended to the "Biography of Wang Shouren [Yangming] 王守仁傳". See *Ming Shi*, Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et.al. (ed.) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) Vol. 17, *juan* 195, p. 5170.

¹⁷¹ Cited in Yang Guorong 楊國榮's *Xinxue zhi si: Wang Yangming zhexuede chanshi* 心學之思 : 王陽明哲學的闡釋 [The thinking of the School of the Mind: an explication of Wang Yangming's philosophy] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian cbs, 1997), p. 33.

¹⁷² See *Wang Yangming quanji*, pp76-77 and *Zhu Wengong wenji* 朱文公文集 Volume 30 [The complete works of Zhu Xi] *Da Zhang Jingfu* 答張敬夫 [In answer to Zhang Jingfu].

¹⁷³ See *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* (*shang*); *juan* 3 *chuanxi lu* (*xia*) p. 28, trans. in Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living*, p. 247.

One of the main areas of criticism was his four axioms (*si ju jiao* 四句教), debated in a famous conversation between Wang and two of his disciples, Wang Ji 王畿 (1498-1583) and Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1496-1574). Wing-tsit Chan translates the four statements in question as:-

“In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil.
When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists.
The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil.
The investigation of things is to do good and remove evil.”¹⁷⁴

Wang Ji misinterpreted Yangming’s doctrine that “in the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil” and, taking it out of context, he concluded that “there must also be no such distinction in the will, in knowledge, and in things.” According to Timothy Brook, this began the process of absorption of Buddhist ideas into the School of the Mind,¹⁷⁵ a process which was held to blame by many early Qing literati for the downfall of the Ming Dynasty.¹⁷⁶

The confident individualism advocated in Wang’s philosophy is best illustrated in his concept of intuitive knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知). He proposed that all traditional moral virtues, such as righteousness and benevolence, are present within an individual’s mind, and can be practised best by simply following what he instinctively believes to be correct. Such intuition guides the individual in the practice of these virtues and this is its primary purpose. Wang believed that one’s intuitive knowledge showed what one should be, but

¹⁷⁴ See *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* (shang) *chuanxi lu* (xia) pp. 33-34, trans. in Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living*, p. 243.

¹⁷⁵ Brook, *Praying for Power*, p. 63.

¹⁷⁶ Many later intellectuals blamed the Wang school in general for the demise of the Ming, failing to differentiate between doctrines of Wang Yangming himself and those of his students, but some others were more discerning in their criticism, notably Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695) and his teacher Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578-1645). Liu Zongzhou believed that Wang Ji had fallen into the pit of Buddhism. Liu states that Wang wasted his life, studying for eighty years in vain, and finally describes him as “a man who carries the spear into his own house.” These comments were included by Huang Zongxi in the “Sayings of my teacher” *shishuo* 師說 section of his *Records of Ming Scholars* (*Ming Ruxue An* 明儒學案), translated as “On Wang Chi” in “Quotations from Liu Tsung-chou” in *The Records of Ming Scholars by Huang Tsung-hsi* (ed. by Julia Ching and Chaoying Fang) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987) pp. 58-60.

that this would take hard study and discipline to achieve. His doctrine of the extension of this innate knowledge, formulated in 1521, is the culmination of his whole philosophy.

The marked trend throughout the late Ming towards *sanjiao* syncretism, which was criticized so vehemently by later scholars, was undoubtedly due to the flourishing of self-confidence, humanitarianism and pragmatism resulting from Wang's individualistic liberalism, which affected society at all levels.

- Towards the idealisation of childlikeness

One part of this general discourse on the nature of the mind, was that of the pure, original mind of the child. There was much discussion during the Han 漢 dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) on the essence of human nature, and thus of the new-born infant: whether it was inherently good, exemplified by Mencius' 孟子 (c.372-289 B.C.) tale of the man instinctively saving a child from drowning,¹⁷⁷ or whether it was evil, as suggested by Xunzi's 荀子 (298-238 B.C.) metaphors of crooked wood and blunt metal needing harsh refinement before they can be of use.¹⁷⁸ In general, despite some attempts to predict that certain babies would be wicked, due to the time or nature (eg breech) of their birth, their 'wolf-like cries', or their physiognomy, the prevalent view was that morality could, and should be developed, in all infants.¹⁷⁹ According to Xunzi, children have a great potential which requires to be developed through education. There was a great expansion in provision of education during the Han, partly due to the failure of the Legalist view of law.¹⁸⁰

The infant was essentially seen, particularly in Confucian sources, as a blank sheet which required education in order to grow and develop into a useful member of society. Confucian writings stress the incomplete nature of the infant, who required systematic

¹⁷⁷ See Mencius 孟子, "Gongsun chou shang" 公孫丑上, no. 6.

¹⁷⁸ See Xunzi 荀子, chapter 23 "On the evilness of human nature" (*xing e* 性惡).

¹⁷⁹ See Kinney, "Dyed Silk", pp. 24-6.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

training in the classics to achieve his potential, while Daoists focus on the huge capacity, physical perfection, and spiritual superiority of even the unborn child.¹⁸¹ While there were exceptions to this, notably the Yellow Emperor, who could talk at birth, and Confucius' own declaration that "Those who know things at birth are most superior",¹⁸² the vast majority of Confucian texts which have any reference to childhood are in fact treatises on education. Infants need to be enlightened (*qimeng* 啟蒙) from their original state of ignorance and the means to achieve this is the main theme of these works.

Nevertheless, the tradition of privileging this state of being began within the Confucian tradition as early as Mencius, in his discussion and idealisation of the *chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心 which, he believed, a great man never lost.¹⁸³ While this concept, or its abbreviated form of *chixin*, is often translated as 'the naked mind', its basic meaning is 'the mind of an infant'. In this sense, it is evident that even in the earliest Confucian discourse, there is some conflict between the pure innocence of the unadorned infant's mind, and the requirement for a strict code of education in order to be a complete person (*chengren* 成人) capable of moral judgement. While ideals of infant perfection are clearly reminiscent of Daoist doctrine, the early Confucian *chizi zhi xin* had its own specific attributes.

Of the abbreviated form, *chixin*, it is declared in the *Xunzi* that "The achievements of officialdom, and the worries that follow it, must be dealt with by a happy sincere mind (*yu yin chixin* 愉殷赤心)."¹⁸⁴ The annotator to this text, Wang Xianqian 王先謙, notes that the *chixin* is a fundamentally single-minded mind. (*chixin zhe, benxin bu za er* 赤心者，本心不雜貳). Indeed, this totally concentrated will (*zhuanyi de xin* 至

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 34-5.

¹⁸² *The Analects* 16:9 It is interesting to note that Confucius declares elsewhere that he was not himself born with any knowledge but is instead keen to acquire it (7:20). Moreover, according to legend, Wang Yangming was also unable to speak until the age of four.

¹⁸³ Mencius, *Li lou xia* 離婁下: 12: "Da ren zhe, bu shi qi chizi zhi xin zhe ye 大人者，不失其赤子之心者也". The idea of preserving your mind (*cun xin* 存心) is itself an important part of Mencius' philosophy. See, eg., *Li lou xia*: 28, where such preservation of the mind is cited as the defining criterion of a great man.

¹⁸⁴ *Xunzi* "Wangzhi", (*Xunzi duben* 荀子讀本 [Wang Chonglin annot.] rev. ed. [Taipei: Sanminshuju, 1995] 王制 Wangzhi p. 147).

專一的心志) is the first definition given for *chixin* in the *Hanyu da cidian*.¹⁸⁵ The concept of an infant's mind being extremely focussed on one single object or ideal is one which is common to much of the discourse on the child's mind in China, and one which I will return to in the discussion and reevaluation of the concept of *chi* 痴 in chapter 6 of this thesis. It is also noteworthy that Mencius and Xunzi, who are normally seen as propagating exactly opposing doctrines about whether man's fundamental nature is good or evil, both consider this earliest, infant's mind, as an ideal and something which should be preserved.

Another aspect of the *chixin* is its vulnerability. In the *Later History of the Han* (*Hou Han Shu* 後漢書), it is related that Emperor Guang Wudi 光武帝, in an attempt to inspire loyalty and courage in the surrendered enemy troops, rode among them unarmed. The compiler Fan Ye 范曄 (398-446 AD) exclaims "If Xiao Wang 蕭王 [Guang Wudi] places his naked heart (*chixin*) before the people in this way, how could they be reluctant to give up their lives for him!"¹⁸⁶

The *chixin*, then, is fundamentally desirable, symbolic of a single-minded purity and sincerity which both gives you an advantage in dealing with complicated affairs of state, but yet also leaves you 'naked' and thus, to some extent, at the mercy of others.

However, even in this early discourse, there is a recognition of the difference between the childlike ideal and inappropriate childishness. *Tong* 童, generally translated as 'child', is used generically with the sense of immaturity, or a lack of development.¹⁸⁷ From the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, composed around the fourth century B.C., it appears that in pre-imperial times the fact that a grown man should still possess a 'child's mind' (*tongxin*) was considered portentous. "At that time Duke Zhao, at the age of nineteen, still had the mind

¹⁸⁵ See HYDCD, vol. 9, p. 1158.

¹⁸⁶ "Xiao Wang tui chixin zhi ren fu zhong, an de bu tou si hu!" 蕭王推赤心置人腹中，安得不投死乎! *Hou Han Shu*, Guangwuji: Gengshi er nian; p.4.

¹⁸⁷ See, for example, *Xunzi* "shanlin bu tong 山林不童", where *tong* is used to mean devoid of plants and other growth. (*Xunzi duben* 荀子讀本 [Wang Chonglin annot.] rev. ed. [Taipei: Sanminshuju, 1995] 王制 Wangzhi p. 145).

of a child (*tongxin*), and so the lord knew that he would not die a natural death.”¹⁸⁸ It is interesting that here the conclusion drawn here about Duke Zhao’s immaturity was actually based on the fact that he did not understand appropriate behaviour and smiled at his uncle’s funeral, proving himself unfilial. Thus filial piety and this negative version of the *tongxin* are contrasted.

In the Song dynasty, Neo-Confucian doctrine continued to construct a perfect infantile state and to postulate about the possibility of returning to it. The formulation of human nature by the great Song Neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) was that its original moral purity was damaged from birth by contact with the world, and the consequent arousal of the seven emotions, namely pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, love, hate and desire:-

“Before it is aroused, the five moral principles of his nature, called humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness, are complete. As his physical form appears, it comes into contact with external things and is aroused from within. As it is aroused from within, the seven feelings.....ensue. As feelings become strong and increasingly reckless, his nature becomes damaged.”¹⁸⁹

Put another way, this is an expression of the duality of human nature, the perfection of its innate principles (*li* 理) and the contamination it inevitably receives by worldly contact, through the presence of material forces (*qi* 氣). Education was the only means to regain one’s original state.

- The Wang school’s contribution to the discourse

As a result of Wang Yangming’s theory of innate knowledge, the status of the child was elevated. Indeed, Wang’s own view of childhood and elementary education was extremely progressive for its time:-

¹⁸⁸ *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳: Xiang: sanshi yi nian 襄 : 三十一年 .

¹⁸⁹ Cited and translated in Saari, *Legacies of Childhood*, p. 30.

“It is in the nature of children to indulge in play and dislike restraint. It is like the budding of a plant. If it has plenty of freedom to expand, it will proliferate. If it meets with hindrance and obstruction, it will wither. When we teach children we must kindle their enthusiasm and make everything a joy. Then they will advance of their own accord without ceasing. It is just like plants nourished by timely rain and spring breezes. They will grow exuberantly. If they are visited upon with ice and frost, they will lose their vital force and weaken daily.”¹⁹⁰

Although to contemporary eyes this may seem little more than common sense, Wang Yangming's ideas can be contrasted with those of his contemporary, Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474-1544) who, in his condemnation of the so-called heterodox schools, took a very different approach to this question. He asks “Suppose a new-born baby is placed in confinement, and is unable to contact the outside world, or to experience human affairs. When he becomes adult and is taken back to society, he will not be able to tell a horse from an ox. How then could he know the proprieties of the relationships between ruler and subject, between father and son, between husband and wife, between the elder and the younger, and between friends?”¹⁹¹ This view is typical of the Confucian orthodoxy, for whom the rituals of social interaction were paramount, and for whom the infant was entirely dysfunctional without education. Against such a background, Wang Yangming's proclamation appears extraordinary. Pei-yi Wu describes the dramatic effects of these doctrines on the contemporary society:-

“Although no Confucian would have believed in the sinful state of the newborn, strict discipline and a didactic approach to elementary education had until this time been the staple of the Confucian attitude toward children. With the Wang school the entire approach shifted. The innocence of children was strongly reaffirmed, and the preservation of this quality became more important than the mere acquisition of knowledge.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ From *Wang Wencheng gong quan shu* (shang) pp.80-81, trans. by Pei-yi Wu, op.cit., p 146.

¹⁹¹ From “A scholastic analysis for Shilong Academy” (Shilong shuyuan xuebian 石龍書院學辯) cited and translated in Shi Jün (ed.) *Selected Readings from Famous Chinese Philosophers Vol. 2*. (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue cbs, 1995) pp. 163-4 (I have modified the translation slightly).

¹⁹² Pei-yi Wu, “Childhood remembered”, p. 146.

Wu goes on to compare the role of the Wang school in China and that of the Romantic movement in the West, both of which stressed the purity of the child and both of which heralded an era in which children were sentimentalised in literature.¹⁹³

Despite his enlightened view of childhood, Wang Yangming also stressed continually the need to cultivate one's innate knowledge, setting him in marked contrast to Li Zhi (see below). On one occasion, Wang explains that this innate knowledge possessed by the child in no way conflicts with the need for education, and educators, in order to extend this knowledge. The knowledge with which the child is born is rather what gives him the natural wish to pursue learning further:-

“If a boy knows enough to stand in awe of a teacher or an elder, this is also due to his innate knowledge. Therefore, although he may be playing, if he sees a teacher or an elder, he will bow and show his respect right away. This shows that he is able to investigate things and extend his innate knowledge of revering teachers and elders. A boy naturally has a boy's way of investigating things and extending knowledge.”¹⁹⁴

There is a similarity between the essence of the mind of the child and that of the sage, but the difference, according to Wang, is in experience. The child is still expected to to acquire an understanding of appropriate behaviour, in dealing with his superiors. The sage, being more experienced, is therefore able to investigate things and extend his knowledge without effort.¹⁹⁵ There is no suggestion that he should attempt to return to an infantile approach to acquiring knowledge.

Some of Wang's later disciples, however, forgot this point and preached iconoclastic nonconformity, with huge popularity. Some of the more extreme cases formed the Taizhou 泰州 school.¹⁹⁶ This school laid great emphasis on the self, believing that self

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁹⁴ *Wang Wencheng gong quan shu* (shang) p. 29, trans. by Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living*, p. 250.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁹⁶ The Taizhou school was led by Wang Gen 王艮 (Xinzhai 心齋 1483-1541) and its main members were Xu Yue 徐樾, Han Zhen 韓貞, Yan Jun 顏鈞, Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉, Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 and He Xinyin

and society were a single continuum. The self, here, was often talked of as *shen* 身 or physical self (including the mind), whereas previously much of the debates within the Wang school focused solely on the *xin*.

One prominent member of the Taizhou school, Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515-1588), was already making explicit connections between these ideas and the tradition of the childlike mind. In Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲's words, the goal of Luo's philosophy was "the recovery of the heart of the infant."¹⁹⁷ Luo contrasted infants as predominantly *yang* while the stiffness and anxiety of adults are caused by an excess of *yin*: "During infancy the *yang* forces are strong and the *yin* forces are weak. Although infants are not without thoughts, they depend on physical functions. Therefore they smile like the warm sun; they are open and cheerful like the dawn, vivacious like a fresh breeze."¹⁹⁸

Such idealisation of the childlike mind was taken furthest by Li Zhi. Often denigrated by later historians as architect of the Mad Chan (*kuangchan* 狂禪) movement, Li is representative of the late Ming so-called leftist wing of the Wang Yangming School of the Mind. He has been described as "one of the most brilliant and complex figures in Chinese thought and literature."¹⁹⁹ Either blamed by later generations for the collapse of the dynasty or else extolled by them for his contribution to the valorisation of vernacular literature and for his outspoken attacks on the hypocrisy of the orthodox literati of the time, Li Zhi is undoubtedly one of the most controversial figures of the time. Chih-p'ing Chou states categorically that "his impact on late Ming literature in general and on the three Yuan brothers in particular, was far greater than that of any other writer."²⁰⁰ Keith McMahon notes that Li Zhi and other thinkers' promotion of free love marriages and

何心隱 as well as Wang Gen's son, Wang Bi 王襞 (see the individual biographies in DMB). For more on the teachings of this school see "Wang Ken and his school" in De Bary's *Learning for One's Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) pp. 155 - 202.

¹⁹⁷ *The Records of Ming Scholars* (Ming ruxue an 明儒學案) Julia Ching (ed) p. 188.

¹⁹⁸ Cited in translation from the *Ming ruxue an* in Pei-yi Wu, "Childhood Remembered", pp. 146-7.

¹⁹⁹ De Bary, *Learning for One's Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 203.

²⁰⁰ Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an school* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 21.

their insistence that men and women were of equal intellectual potential had a direct effect on the developments within the genre of 'beauty-scholar' (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romances in the eighteenth century.²⁰¹

According to the modern scholar of Wang school philosophy, Yang Guorong 楊國榮, the developments which led from the doctrine of innate knowledge to the *tongxin shuo* 童心說 represent a shift to an extremist position.²⁰² In the literary field, in the words of Stephen Owen, Li's essay "touched a whole younger generation,"²⁰³ who had been submerged in the dull formalism of the archaists current among literary theorists of the late Ming.

- "On the childlike mind"

Since the essay "On the childlike mind" (*tongxin shuo*) is widely recognised as representative of Li Zhi's philosophy, and forms the backbone for the discourse on ideals of childlikeness, I have translated it here in full.²⁰⁴

"In the closing words of Longdong Shannong's commentary on the *Romance of the Western Chamber* it is stated "Those in the know say it is inappropriate that I still have a childlike mind." This 'childlike mind' is the true mind. If you say the childlike mind is inappropriate, then you are calling the true mind inappropriate. The childlike mind is purely genuine, without falseness, and is the original source of all ideas. If you lose your childlike mind, then you lose your true mind; if you lose your true mind, then you lose your true self. A person without integrity can never return to his original state."

²⁰¹ See McMahon's *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 100.

²⁰² Yang Guorong, *Wangxue tonglun: cong Wang Yangming dao Xiong Shili* 王學通論：從王陽明到熊十力 [A general discussion of the Wang School: from Wang Yangming to Xiong Shili] (Taipei: Wu nan tushu cbs, 1997), pp. 189-210.

²⁰³ Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 807.

²⁰⁴ I have used the edition of "Tongxin shuo 童心說" [On the childlike mind] in *Li Zhi wenji* 李贄文集 [The collected writings of Li Zhi] edited by Zhang Jianye 張建業 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian cbs, 2000) [LZWJ], Vol. 1, *Fen Shu* 焚書 [A Book to be burned] pp.91-3. The essay has been translated as 'On the Child-Mind' by Stephen Owen in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), pp. 808-9 but since I have some reservations about one or two details, as listed below, I have decided to use my own translation.

Longdong Shannong refers to the late Ming thinker Yan Jun 顏鈞 whose appellation was Shannong 山農.²⁰⁵ Yan had been particularly singled out for criticism by the sixteenth century historian Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590). Wang considered Yan a contemptible illiterate, and held him personally responsible for what he saw as the disintegration of the late Ming intellectual scene.²⁰⁶ Although Yan is not given a separate biography in *The Records of Ming Scholars*, Huang Zongxi notes that his teachings had a profound effect on Luo Rufang, who once sold all his land to buy his freedom when he was imprisoned.²⁰⁷ By identifying himself with Yan in the opening paragraph of his essay, Li Zhi is immediately courting controversy among the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, and his defence of the childlike mind simultaneously becomes a defence of the unacceptable. Li Zhi himself must have assumed that the child's mind would generally not be seen as a positive virtue, or else he would have no need to adopt such a defensive tone in this opening paragraph of his discussion of it.

“The child is the origin of the man; the childlike mind is the origin of the mind. How can the origin of the mind be lost! So how is this childlike mind suddenly lost? This is only its beginning, when things are heard and seen through the ears and eyes, and are then taken to be superior to that which is innate, then the childlike mind is lost. As this increases, morals and principles are imbibed through the senses, and are taken to be superior to that which is innate, and so the childlike mind is lost. As time goes on, and morals, principles and things heard and seen increase day by day, then knowledge and perception becomes daily broader; thus from this we come to know the goodness of things which have beautiful names, and praise them, and the childlike mind is lost; and we come to know the ugliness of things which do not have beautiful names, and we hide them, and the childlike mind is lost. These morals, principles and things heard and seen, all come from the realisation of ideas and principles, which is gained from excessive reading. I don't mean the ancient sages never read! If they did not read, they certainly kept their childlike mind intact; even if they read excessively, still

²⁰⁵ Owen states that this is a reference to Li Zhi himself. While Yan Jun's exact dates are unknown, it is recorded that he was imprisoned in Nanjing in 1568. See Fang Keli 方克立 (ed.) *Zhongguo zhixue da cidian* 中國哲學大辭典 [A dictionary of Chinese philosophy] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1994) p. 735 and the biographical details under the entries for two of Yan's best-known students, He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517-79) and Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515-1588) in Goodrich and Fang (eds.) *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), Vol. 1., p.513 and p. 975 respectively.

²⁰⁶ See De Bary, *Learning for One's Self*, p. 191.

²⁰⁷ See *The Records of Ming Scholars: by Huang Tsung-hsi* Julia Ching (ed) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987) p. 186-7.

because they protected their childlike mind they did not lose it, not like scholars, who, on the contrary, read voraciously in order to understand duty and principles to obstruct it.”

The opening statement of this essay explicitly links the childlike mind to the immature child (*tong*). By accusing the main Confucian educational apparatus (consisting of morals, principles and ‘that which is heard and seen’) of corrupting this mind, Li Zhi launches a head-on attack on the orthodoxy. It is notable that Li Zhi does not condemn reading, even when done to excess, so long as the childlike mind is kept intact, and the reading is not solely motivated by a desire to understand duty and principles. However, despite the apparent idealist individualism of this philosophy, Li Zhi appears to betray himself elsewhere in the essay, when one of his criteria for criticism of these orthodox thinkers is the effect that their state of mind has on their didactic cause:

“Since these scholars obstruct their childlike mind by their learning of duty and principles through excessive reading, what need had the sages to write more books as obstacles to scholars? Once their childlike mind has been obstructed, when words are uttered, they do not come from the heart; when they are revealed in matters of state, their administration is groundless; if they are written out as literary pieces, then these literary pieces don’t reach the mark. It is beauty without substance, and producing radiance from artificiality, it is absolutely impossible to achieve a single sentence of moral worth. Why is this? Because the childlike mind has already been obstructed, and external things which are heard and seen, the way and principles, have been taken in place of the mind.”

Thus Li Zhi does not dismiss the need for writings ‘of moral worth’ but rather stresses that without the childlike mind nothing worthwhile can be achieved. The twentieth century scholar Chen Hong 陳洪 has analysed this inner childlike mind, and outer didacticism in psychoanalytical terms, of the ego (*ziwo*自我), the id (*benwo*本我) and superego (*chaowo*超我).²⁰⁸ Chen suggests that the childlike mind is closest to the id, the methods of the false people are those of the ego, while these ‘external things which are heard and seen, the way and principles’ which have been taken as the mind, correspond to the superego.

²⁰⁸ See Chen Hong’s *Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun shi* 中國小說理論史 [A history of Chinese theories of fiction] (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 68-9.

“Since things which are heard and seen, the way and principles, have been taken to be the mind, then what is spoken all originates from that which is heard and seen, the way and principles, rather than originating from the childlike mind. Even though the words are skilful, what have they to do with the self? Are they not speaking false words with false people, doing false deeds, and writing false writings? Since the person is false, then he has nothing which is not false. Because of this, he speaks to false people with false words, and so false people are delighted; he speaks to false people about false matters, and so false people are delighted; he chats with false people about false writings, and so false people are delighted. There is nothing which is not false, and so nothing fails to give pleasure. When the whole arena is false, how can the petty-minded tell the difference?”

Genuineness (*zhen*) the opposite of this falseness, is the essence of what Li Zhi means by the childlike mind and became a key term and objective for many late Ming writers (see below). Li elaborates on this concept in promotion of his individualist theory of literature, which was to be enormously influential in the late Ming and Qing periods.

“This being the case, although great writings do exist, they are buried under false people, and are not accessible to later generations, and there are so few of them in any case! Why is this? Of all the pieces of great writing in the world, there is not a single one which does not originate from the childlike mind. If the childlike mind were retained, then the way and principles would be irrelevant, things heard and seen would be unsubstantiated, there would be no time when you would not write, no person with whom you didn’t have contact, and there would be no form of writing in which you did not write. Why does poetry have to be like those included in the ancient *Anthology of Literature*; why does prose have to be like the former Qin? By the time of the Six Dynasties, it was the turn of the modern (*jinti*) style; then it was the turn of the marvel tales (*chuanqi*), then of the playscripts (*yuanben*), then of the variety plays (*zaju*), then *The Western Chamber*, then *The Water Margin*, and finally it was the turn of the modern examination essays. All these great writings of different periods cannot be discussed and evaluated with a contemporary bias. So this is why I feel moved by writings which emanate from the childlike mind, but can ignore the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and *Mencius*.”

These ideas about the necessity of considering literary works within the context of which they were produced, hardly radical for a modern audience, were very progressive for their day, when the term ‘ancient’ (古) still had near sacred implications, and when the writings and thoughts of the former great literary writers were unquestionably taken as

models for guidance and imitation in all writing. Li lists the examination essays as merely the latest new literary genre, while in practical terms the *raison d'être* of these essays was to allow candidates to display their breadth of knowledge of the classics and originality or innovation was generally discouraged. Li Zhi's most controversial comments, however, were saved for the closing paragraph of his essay, where the very authenticity of the Neo-Confucian canon is called into question.

“As for the *Six Classics*, the *Analects* and *Mencius*, if they are not full of excessive praise by historians, then they are pieces of lavish admiration by officials. Otherwise, it is what those impractical students and ignorant disciples wrote down from memory of what their teacher had said, beginning without knowing the end, reaching the end by forgetting what had gone before, and writing the book according to their own perceptions. Later scholars didn't investigate, and said that it all came from the mouth of the sage, and decided that all that was before their eyes was scripture. Who realised that most of it was not the words of the sage? Even if some words did come from the sage, it was because he had a specific reason to speak, but only to provide a remedy for a specific malady, to make a timely prescription, in order to save these first-class fools of disciples and impractical students. Giving out medicine for fake illnesses is difficult to sustain: how can this practice have then gone on to be taken as doctrine for so many successive generations? So, then, the *Six Classics*, the *Analects* and *Mencius* are still the pretexts for Neo-Confucianism, and are a hotbed for false people; they plainly cannot be called words from the childlike mind. Alas! How can I find a genuine sage whose childlike mind has not yet been lost and have a talk with him about literature!”

By suggesting that the Neo-Confucian commentaries on the Classics, and even the Classics themselves were somehow invalid and inaccurate records of what the sages actually said, Li Zhi is calling into question the foundation of the whole of the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Once again, Li decries those who he sees are taking alleged utterances by the sages out of context, and applying them at random. Owen notes the playful parallel of the final sentence of this essay with the famous line from the *Zhuangzi*: “The reason for words is the idea; when you get the idea, you forget the words. If only I could find someone who has forgotten words and have a word with him!”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Owen, *Anthology*, p. 811.

In essence, then, the ideal of the childlike mind which Li extolled represented genuineness, naturalness, innocence and spontaneity. It was heavily introverted, viewing external information with suspicion. It was highly subjective, individualistic and reliant on a specific context and time-frame. In many ways, the cultivation of the childlike mind ran absolutely contrary to Confucian dictums on the importance of education, social values, and scholastic traditions and on the preservation of a semi-sacred and ageless literary and philosophical canon.

Li Zhi's "*Tongxin shuo*" is better viewed in terms of a culmination of the long tradition in Chinese philosophy which encompasses Confucian as well as non-Confucian ideas, of idealising the infantile state, rather than as an entirely innovative, heterodox polemic. In the same way, I think that from a contemporary late Ming perspective, we should contextualise this article, rather than viewing it in isolation. Li Zhi was a product of one, albeit radical, branch of the Wang Yangming school, and his ideas evolved from Wang doctrine. In attempting to analyse further what the "childlike mind" could represent to late Ming literati, I will extend the concept to include several of the less extreme doctrines of the Wang school. I will consider two particular philosophical ideas which were hugely influential at this time, and suggest that each of these also resembles a kind of 'proto-consciousness', or a childlike world view.

- The world within the mind

A fundamental aspect of any definition of the mind is an individual's conception of his surroundings, and his relationship with them. One indicator of growing maturity is the emergence of categories and distinctions in a person's world view. The most basic of these distinctions is that of the self, and the non-self, or outside world. Thereafter, all sorts of other distinctions and categorisations such as animate/inanimate, human/non-human and male/female are posited and then confirmed. Conversely, if no such distinctions are made, this can be indicative of an infantile outlook.

If we attempt to relate these ideas of non-differentiation between the self and the other to Chinese philosophical tradition, maxims of Wang Yangming's school of the mind such as "nothing exists outside the mind" (*wu xinwai zhi wu* 無心外之物) can also be viewed in terms of a return to the infantile.

The essence of the relationship between mind and environment was crucial to late Ming philosophical discourse. The pervasive influence of the Wang school was an important aspect of this discourse, as were the growing eclectic trends of the age, shown, for example, in the widespread adoption by Confucian scholars of elements of Buddhist doctrine. I will briefly survey some aspects of these influences below.

- Childlike perspectives on the world

One of the defining characteristics of the infant's mind has been recognised by child psychologists as its all-encompassing nature, an absolute egocentrism which results from an inability to distinguish between the self and the outside world, described by Piaget as a "phenomenon of indifferentiation".²¹⁰ Only through the gradual transition from infancy to early childhood and beyond are these boundaries posited and then affirmed. This is a natural and necessary process. Even in the case of young toddlers, the child psychologist Winnicott warns of the dangers of forcing the differentiation of outer reality and inner imagination.²¹¹

In her memoirs of her childhood growing up as a foreigner in late imperial China, Ida Pruitt reconstructs, in the third person, her own experience as a very young toddler, when one day she leans against a tree:

"‘This is not me,’ she thought with surprise. She lifted her head and looked out into the courtyard. Huge blue figures loomed and moved and were unfocused

²¹⁰ Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson trans.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962) p. 73.

²¹¹ See D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), pp.70-72.

shapes in the distance that meant nothing. More 'not me.' How much 'not me' there was. The rest of her life was to be spent in learning about 'me' and 'not me', in trying to understand them both in ever widening circles -- of experience, of thought, and of understanding, widening ever outward like the circles curving away from a stone dropped into a pond."²¹²

While this is of course a reconstructed memory of an early experience which may well be distorted, it is also a useful illustration of the process which young children pass through, learning to differentiate themselves from their surroundings. An understanding of this process is also fundamental to any philosophical discourse on the nature of the self and the environment.

A crucial aspect, then, of the child's mind as interpreted by modern psychology, is that distinctions between self and other are obscured, causing the child to live in a world between reality and fantasy, in which the question of what is real and what is not is irrelevant. Since a similar dissolution of boundaries between the inner self and the outside world was also central to the philosophical discourse in the late Ming, when discussing the cult of the child of this period, inclusion of these ideas is, I believe, justified.

- Confucian discourse on the mind and the environment

Lu Jiuyuan, the co-founder of the Lu-Wang Neo-Confucian tradition, was the first to suggest that all principle (*li* 理) is contained within the individual's mind. He declared that 'the universe is my mind and my mind is the universe'.²¹³ This stress on the all-encompassing nature of the mind, the idea that the principles of the universe can be found within oneself, was one of the defining characteristics of the tradition which later came to be commonly referred to as the School of the Mind, or the Wang Yangming school.

"The Teacher was roaming in Nanzhen. A friend pointed to flowering trees on a cliff and said, '[You say] there is nothing under heaven external to the mind.

²¹² See *A China Childhood* by Ida Pruitt (San Francisco: China Materials Center Inc, 1978), pp. 1-2.

²¹³ Translated in Wing-tsit Chan, *Sourcebook*, p. 579.

These flowering trees on the high mountain blossom and drop their blossoms of themselves. What have they to do with my mind?’

The Teacher said, ‘Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your mind.’”²¹⁴

This well-known anecdote about Wang Yangming is representative of one of the major tenets of *xinxue* philosophy: the internalisation of external phenomena. Phrases such as *wu xinwai zhi wu* 無心外之物 feature prominently in discussions of Wang’s work and of its influence. The *wu* 物 as defined by Wang, however, is not merely limited to physical things such as the blossom in the above anecdote, but rather can include actions and events, such as serving one’s parents, or showing brotherly love and can be equivalent to *shi* 事. “What emanates from the mind is the will (*yi* 意). The original substance of the will is knowledge, and wherever the will is directed is a thing (*wu*)..... Therefore I say that there are neither principles nor things outside the mind. (*wu xinwai zhi li, wu xinwai zhi wu*)”²¹⁵ Wang thus expands the concept of a thing (*wu*) to include actions which are driven by intention, such as fulfilling familial responsibilities or being humane to others. As Yang Guorong comments, what Wang is stressing here is not an actual belief that the physical world does not exist outside one’s mind, but rather that we create a perceived or signified world (*yiyi shijie* 意義世界) which is internal to our mind, and that thus everything we see is an entirely subjective reflection of reality.²¹⁶

After Wang Yangming’s death, the debate over the relation between the mind and the external world continued. One of the principal spheres for this debate was within the ecumenical movement between the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, which was particularly strong during the late Ming.

²¹⁴ Wing-tsit Chan’s translation, *Instructions*, p.222.

²¹⁵ *Wang Wencheng gong quan shu (shang) juan 3 Chuanxi lu (shang)* p6 trans. in Chan, *Instructions*, p. 14.

²¹⁶ See Yang Guorong, *Xinxue zhi si*, pp. 96-108.

- Buddhist influences in the debate

A major criticism of the Wang school by later Chinese intellectuals was its perceived failure to expunge Buddhist influences from its doctrines. Questions such as the nature of the mind and illusory nature of the external world, in particular, were felt to have been dominated by Buddhist ideology. The term and concept of *san jiao heyi* 三教合一 (the unity of the three teachings) originated during the Yuan dynasty, as a means of explaining the relationship between the three main Chinese philosophical traditions to the Mongol invaders. By the time of the Ming, however, the ecumenical ideas were less widespread, and it was not until the mid-sixteenth century that the term was revived, with the stress on a similar goal, achieved by differing means. Thinkers of the Taizhou school in particular, went so far as to state that even the means were not that different. Metaphors of different roads to a single destination, different rivers flowing towards a single sea were used by this school, demonstrating that the various methods favoured by Confucianism and Buddhism differed only by what Timothy Brook has called “a distinction of style, more than substance”.²¹⁷ Araki Kengo, in a study of the relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism during this period, concludes that “both the Confucian School of Mind and the Buddhist developed manifold subbranches and their boundaries became vague.”²¹⁸

One of the last great Buddhist monks of the Ming period, Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), was the first Chinese Buddhist monk to leave his autobiography. In 1572 he went to Mt. Wutai with his friend the monk Fudeng 福登. Fudeng told him:-

“Environment [jing 境] arises from the mind: it does not come from outside. Have you not heard the ancient saying that if one has been exposed to the sound of a stream for thirty years without its activating the mind, he can bear personal witness to the perfection of Guanyin?”

I thereupon chose a narrow wooden bridge over the brook and sat or stood on it every day. At first I heard the sound of the water clearly. After a while I reached

²¹⁷ Brook, *Praying for Power*, p. 69.

²¹⁸ Kengo “Confucianism and Buddhism in the Late Ming”, in W.T. de Bary (ed.) *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 61.

the point that the water would become audible only when my thought was activated. One day when I sat on the bridge I suddenly forgot my own person and the water became completely mute. From that time on all sounds were silenced and I was no longer disturbed by them.”²¹⁹

Another very influential Buddhist monk, Zibo Daguan 紫柏達觀 (1544-1604) stated: “Nothing exists apart from the self and there is no self apart from things. Since there is no self apart from things, the activities (*yong* 用) of the self are the activities of things. Since there is no thing apart from the self, the activities of things are those of the self.”²²⁰

While there were similarities inherent in Chinese thought which may have favoured the emergence of an syncretic tradition,²²¹ philosophically, of course, there are fundamental differences between Buddhism and Confucianism. “Both, for instance, deny that visible phenomena constitute the highest level of reality, but whereas Buddhism finds truth in the very unreality of phenomena, Neo-Confucianism redirects the search for truth away from mere phenomena, whether real or unreal, to the principles that they represent. These principles then merge with the principles that order the cosmos and inform human morality.”²²² However, on a practical level, and particularly perhaps for those members of the literati who had no formal training in specific Buddhist doctrines, terminology and superficial conceptualisations were often used interchangeably.

Social conditions of the age also increased the effect the syncretic movement had on the late Ming literati. Timothy Brook argues that the disenfranchisement of many members of the gentry, who having only passed the lower levels of the exams were unable to find permanent posts, encouraged a growing interest in Buddhism, as they sought to find a

²¹⁹ From Deqing's autobiography 足本憨山大師年譜疏註 p33, cited and translated here by Pei-yi Wu, in “The Spiritual Autobiography of Te-ch'ing”, in de Bary (ed.) *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, p78).

²²⁰ *Zibo laoren ji: Jie tanbao shuo* 紫柏老人集：戒貪暴說, p 320, Jing Dazhong, from *Da Riben cang jing* 大日本藏經, cited in Araki Kengo's essay “Confucianism and Buddhism in the Late Ming”, in W.T. de Bary (ed.) *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, pp 59-60.

²²¹ Some Chinese terms themselves may indicate a bias towards a somewhat illusory world view. Paolo Santangelo makes a tentative suggestion that one term for all natural phenomena, *wanxiang* 萬象 implies “nature as being in some way one's sensation of it” see “Literary Conceptions of Nature”, in Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung (eds.) *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 624.

²²² Brook, p. 58.

place for themselves in contemporary society, since: "Buddhism gave them an opportunity to appear as an elite of the mind and the spirit, in addition to being an elite of the land and the law."²²³ Monasteries were frequently used by the gentry as quiet, inexpensive lodgings in which to prepare for the exams, or simply as meeting places and lecture halls. This latter trend was particularly common among the Wang Yangming school. Wang himself frequently lectured in monasteries, even housing his students in Buddhist dormitories, and many later thinkers followed his example. Members of the gentry were frequently solicited to be patrons of monasteries, either financially or by conferring poems or other literary approbations. By the end of the Ming increasing numbers of gentry, either for economic reasons, or as a protest at the fall of the government, were giving up their quest for officialdom and actually entering the monastic orders.²²⁴ Brook concludes: "Buddhism thus played a significant role in the cultural construction of the late-Ming gentry, helping to illustrate their status and define their autonomy at a time when status was contestable and autonomy unthinkable."²²⁵

Members of the Taizhou and Gongan schools were particularly open to Buddhist ideas.²²⁶ In 1588, Li Zhi adopted the Buddhist tonsure and moved into a Buddhist monastery, but he insisted that he still remained a Confucian in substance (*sui luo fa wei seng, er shi ru ye* 雖落髮為僧，而實儒也).²²⁷ Several of his essays and articles, however, promote the *san jiao* syncretism, although not altogether consistently. While one of his articles argues that the backbone of the three traditions is Confucianism ("Why the three teachings come down to Confucianism" *san jiao gui ru shuo* 三教歸儒說),²²⁸ in another essay he states categorically "those who claim that the sages of the three teachings differ are truly

²²³ Ibid., p. 51.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

²²⁶ All three of the Yuan brothers became lay disciples of the Buddhist master Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615). Yuan Hongdao studied for a while at the Yunqi monastery in Hangzhou, under Zhuhong. Yuan's admiration of Buddhist methods of chanting and meditation is evident from the name he gave his daughter, Channa 禪那. It should be noted, though, that the predilection for Buddhist ideas of these late Ming Confucians was not all-encompassing and certain practices, such as begging for alms, were generally not condoned.

²²⁷ The author's preface to *Chu tan ji* 初潭集, *LZWJ*, vol. 5, p. 1.

²²⁸ "Sanjiao gui ru shuo" 三教歸儒說, in *Xu cangshu* 續藏書, *LZWJ*, vol. 1, p. 72.

deluded 則謂三教聖人不同者，真妄也。”²²⁹ Li opens his reply to Tao Shikui 陶石簣，²³⁰ with a discussion of the relationship between the mind and the external world:-

“Having no obstruction between one’s mind and one’s environment, is not something that can be accomplished consciously. The mind is the environment, the environment is the mind, they have never been able to be broken apart, only seeing the original source, nature has no need to distinguish them clearly in advance.”²³¹

Before this, in the early 1570s, he had joined other Neo-Confucianists like Jiao Hong and engaged with eminent monks at Qixia monastery, to hold discussions on doctrinal issues in the school of the mind, forming a Lotus Society (*Lian She* 蓮社).²³²

One part-result of, part-stimulus for, this syncretic trend then, was the reassessment of the nature of external phenomena and the relationship of oneself and one’s mind to them. For the majority of the late Ming literati, the importance of questioning the nature of things was being devalued and, with the dual influences of Wang school philosophy and Buddhist doctrine, the nature of the subjective mind and the individual conception of the world was becoming the central issue.

In this philosophical discourse, the boundaries between the self and the non-self are eroded, reflecting an approach which is, I argue, also reminiscent of an infant’s view of

²²⁹ “Da Ma Lishan” 答馬歷山 [In reply to Ma Lishan], in *Xu fenshu* 續焚書, *juan* 1, p. 1 *LZWJ*, vol. 1 (I am using my own translation, although I originally found the reference cited in Yü Chünfang, p. 104. The translation she uses, citing a Japanese scholar Sakai, seems not to correspond with the original in some areas.) Li Zhi also compiled detailed commentaries on Daoist texts: *Laozi jie* 老子解 and *Zhuangzi jie* 莊子解, in *LZWJ* vol. 7. Yü notes that the best examples of Li Zhi’s eclectic views come from the morality book he compiled, *The Record of Causes and Effects* (*Yinguo lu* 因果錄), “For even though the Buddhist karma is given predominant emphasis, the workings of karma are also illustrated by Taoist and Confucian deeds and thoughts.” (see Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism*, p. 105 The *Yinguo lu* is also contained in vol. 7 of *LZWJ*).

²³⁰ Shikui was the appellation of Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (1562-1609), a close friend and supporter of Yuan Hongdao. See, eg., Chih-p’ing Chou, op.cit., p. 27.

²³¹ “Fu Tao Shikui” 復陶石簣 [In response to Tao Shikui] in *Xu Fenshu*, *LZWJ*, vol. 1, p. 8.

²³² See Brook, p. 104. Jiao Hong also believed that Buddhist teachings could be beneficial to understanding Confucian texts: “If they can explicate this principle [the mysteries of human nature and life] and become a guide to my nature and life, then Buddhist sutras are no other than commentaries to Confucius and Mencius. Why should we reject them?” (cited and translated in Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism*, p. 104).

the outside world. Indeed, in his description of the philosopher Luo Rufang, Huang Zongxi commented: "Luo's teaching takes as its goal the recovery of the heart of the infant, which requires neither learning nor exercise of thought, and he regards as essential becoming one with Heaven and Earth and the myriad things, the discarding of the body, and the forgetting of distinctions between things and the self."²³³ Here Huang appears to make this very link, between the all-encompassing nature of the self, and the nature of the childlike mind.

- Animism in children

The second feature of the conception of the outside world I will consider here is the humanisation of the natural, non-human world. Personification of the environment is a common literary device which was developed to an extreme in seventeenth century literature. I will first very briefly look at the philosophical debate around the degree of consciousness of animals, plants and inanimate objects.

Just as a child does not differentiate between the self and the non-self, neither does (s)he differentiate between human and non-human, living and inanimate. An important aspect of a childlike conception of the world is the indiscriminate endowment of human characteristics on non-human elements, tentatively described in Jean Piaget's thesis on the child's conception of the world, as animism.²³⁴

By this Piaget is analysing the child's lack of distinction between the living and the inanimate, and his/her consequent ascribing of human qualities, or at least consciousness, to objects which are for adults inert. Piaget links the attribution of consciousness to the environment with the assimilation of life to activities and divides the child's mental

²³³ *The Records of Ming Scholars* (Ming ruxue an 明儒學案), Julia Ching (ed), p. 188.

²³⁴ *The Child's Conception of the World*, J. and A. Tomlinson (trans.) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1929), p.169.

development into four basic phases:²³⁵ first, that all things can be conscious, and can feel pain and other sensations; second, that things which can move are conscious; third, that things which can move spontaneously are conscious; and finally that only animals (and people) are conscious. On average, this final phase is reached at around eleven or twelve years of age.²³⁶ Piaget also defined three stages in the naturalisation of reality:-

“During the first stage, the self and things are completely confused; there is participation between all and everything, and desire can exert a magical activity over reality. During the second stage, the self is differentiated from things, but subjective aspects still adhere to things things are necessarily animate, because since the self is not yet distinguished from things, psychical and physical ideas are not yet dissociated... Finally, in a third stage, the self is so far distinguished from things that the instruments of thought can no longer be conceived as adherent in things, words are no longer in things, images and thought are situated in the head.”²³⁷

Primitive aspects of animism, and the corresponding similarities between the primitive and the childlike mindset were noted by Freud.²³⁸ Ruth Benedict defines animism in children as a lack of differentiation between their treatment of animate and inanimate objects: “the child assumes that his relations to the inanimate world are of one pattern with those to the animate world of people: he fondles as he would his mother the pretty thing that pleased him; he strikes the door that has slammed on him.”²³⁹ The twentieth century psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in his study of fairy tales, relates it to his argument on the importance of fantasy for children:

“To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own..... In animistic thinking, not

²³⁵ Piaget is wary, however, of the pitfalls of strict categorisation, noting that there is some wavering between these stages, and suggests that these stages are mainly indicative of a general trend of the child's thinking processes (*Child's Conception of the World*, p.188).

²³⁶ *Child's Conception of the World*, p.186.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.

²³⁸ S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (rep.) (Middlesex: Pelican, 1940), pp.107-137. Animism was also the subject of a major part of the acclaimed thesis on primitive peoples, by E.B.Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1903) (4th edition).

²³⁹ See “Animism” by Ruth Benedict, in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1948) cited in Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairy tales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p 314.

only animals feel and think as we do, but even stones are alive, so to be turned into stone simply means that the being has to remain silent and unmoving for a time. By the same reasoning, it is entirely believable when previously silent objects begin to talk, give advice, and join the hero on his wanderings. And since everything is inhabited by a spirit similar to all other spirits (namely that of the child who has projected his spirit into all these things), because of this inherent sameness it is believable that man can change into animal, or the other way round, as in 'Beauty and the Beast' or 'The Frog King'. Since there is no sharp line drawn between living and dead things, the latter, too, can come to life."²⁴⁰

Thus, boundaries between human and non-human, animate and inanimate, and life and death are non-existent, and fairy tales are believable, providing children with the necessary space for fantasy. While it would be naive to suggest that the conception of childhood formulated by western twentieth century psychoanalysts would exactly mirror that of seventeenth-century Chinese literati, the idea that children animate their toys and the objects around them is not, I think, too culturally or temporally specific.

- The conscious world of the Neo-Confucians

These themes were evidently relevant to the great Neo-Confucian philosophers. As early as the Song dynasty (960-1279), Zhu Xi stated that all of nature, including plants, was endowed with a form of consciousness:-

"Take a pot of flowers, for example. When watered, they flourish gloriously, but if broken off, they will wither and droop. Can they be said to be without consciousness? Zhou Maoshu 周茂叔 [Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073)] did not cut the grass growing outside his window and said that he felt toward the grass as he felt toward himself. This shows that plants have consciousness [in so far as it has the spirit of life]. But the consciousness of animals is inferior to that of man, and that of plants is inferior to that of animals."²⁴¹

When Wang Yangming is asked whether or not plants, trees, tiles or rocks also possess the innate knowledge (*liangzhi*) of man, he seems to sidestep the question slightly in his reply, the first sentence of which should not be quoted out of context: "The innate

²⁴⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, op.cit., pp. 46-47.

²⁴¹ Trans. in Wing-tsit Chan, *Sourcebook*, p. 623.

knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man.”²⁴² Here, then, Wang re-emphasises the unity of mind and the environment, as outlined above, but does not actually take up the challenge of whether or not these inanimate objects are independently sentient. When he is questioned further about the relative importance of the natural world, he displays a fairly moderate, even utilitarian attitude: “We love both plants and animals, and yet we can tolerate feeding animals with plants. We love both animals and men, and yet we can tolerate butchering animals to feed our parents, provide for religious sacrifices, and entertain guests.....We can tolerate all these because by principle these should be done.”²⁴³

It is interesting that while Wang Yangming philosophy provides much of the inspiration for later writing by individualist writers of the Gonggan and Jingling schools, who frequently endowed nature with human qualities in their literature, Wang’s overriding emphasis on the human mind means that objective contemplation of the outside world, even the openness to questions of the consciousness of natural objects, is necessarily restricted.

This was one area of the original Wang doctrine which the Taizhou school modified considerably. Li Zhi’s “Essay on a scroll painting of square bamboo” (*fang zhu tujuan wen* 方竹圖卷文) has been cited and partially translated by Zeitlin as evidence of a shift to a deeper level of anthropomorphising of non-human objects.²⁴⁴ Writing about the fourth century writer Wang Huizhi, famous for his obsession with bamboo, and his references to the plant as ‘these gentlemen (*cijun* 此君)’, Li Zhi states that all things in the world are equally endowed with a spirit (*shen* 神).²⁴⁵ Li develops this idea of a spirit, to allow the plants to be proactive in their relationship with and emotional attachment to

²⁴² Trans. in Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions*, p. 221.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁴⁴ Zeitlin, *Historian*, pp. 76-78. The original text is found in Vol.1 of *LZWJ*, “Fenshu” *juan* 3, pp. 121-2.

²⁴⁵ The extent of Buddhist influences on Li Zhi, which I alluded to earlier, are also contributory factors to Li’s view of the nature of external phenomena, and have been discussed widely.

Wang: "But it wasn't the case that Wang loved bamboos -- rather the bamboos loved Wang of their own accord. For when a man of Wang's mettle gazed at mountains, rivers, stones, and earth, all would have naturally grown beautiful, these gentlemen not least of all."²⁴⁶ By this time, endowment of non-human and even inanimate objects with human qualities is acceptable in philosophical discourse.

The philosophical debate on the nature of the environment was far more complex than the foregoing may suggest and some of these arguments formed the background for the intense exploration in the early and mid-Qing dynasty of cosmological issues about the nature of matter (*qi* 氣). However, the belief running throughout Chinese traditional thought, that the whole universe is pervaded with a single life force, manifesting itself in different ways in conjunction with different elements, left the question of animal and plant consciousness open for debate.²⁴⁷

This openness also forms the background for the common Chinese literary and artistic process of emotional displacement (*yiqing* 移情), the transferral of sentiment from humans onto non-human objects. The writer and philosopher Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 (1899 - 1986) has analysed this traditional trope and compared it with the German aesthetic concept of *Einfühlung*, or 'putting one's feelings into something', usually translated as 'empathy',²⁴⁸ which he translates as *yiqing zuoyong* 移情作用.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ I have used Zeitlin's translation. (op.cit., p. 77).

²⁴⁷ In contrast, for example, the Christian tradition assumes that plants, animals and humans, although sharing the same creator, are created separately and independently of one another.

²⁴⁸ This was in fact the original meaning of the English word 'empathy', which was first used as a translation of the German term, but the term could be misleading since the word is used now in a more general sense.

²⁴⁹ This analysis appears in the third of a series of essays dealing with aesthetic experience, entitled the 'Unity of self and objects -- the displacement effect' "Meigan jingyan de fenxi (san) wu wo tongyi (yiqing zuoyong)" 美感經驗的分析 (三) 物我同一 (移情作用) in *Zhu Guangqian meixue wenxue lunwen xuanji* 朱光潛美學文學論文選集.[Selected essays on aesthetics and literature by Zhu Guangqian] (Changsha: Hunan renmin cbs, 1980).

Citing the well-known anecdote of ‘The joy of fishes’ from the *Zhuangzi*,²⁵⁰ Zhu demonstrates that the trope of displacement of human emotions onto non-human forms can be found in the very earliest Chinese sources. The most quoted lines from the classic are Huizi’s question in reply to Zhuangzi’s comment on the joy of fishes: “You are not a fish. How can you know the joy of fishes?” and the reply “You are not me. How do you know I don’t know the joy of fishes?” As well as the assumption that the non-human world can experience emotions, this conversation also preempts the whole debate on transferral of sentiment. Zhu argues that this can be extended to all people or objects external to oneself, partly because it is only natural to use one’s own experience and intuition as standards and then, by extension, to apply these when forming judgements about the external world. Zhu further stresses that the concept of *yiqing* is a specific type of projection (*waishe zuoyong* 外射作用) since it refers to a two-way process and since it implies a complete lack of distinction between subject and object. In other words, while any judgement we make is bound to be subjective, *yiqing* occurs only when the boundaries between self and the outside world are entirely forgotten.

Zhu also specifically links this traditional trope of emotional displacement (*yiqing*) to a childlike disposition. “Children often speak to their toys, are reluctant to let other people mistreat them, sometimes even feeding them and putting them to bed. This is because they ‘project outside themselves’ to understand the emotions and needs of their toys. We adults have not completely discarded this psychological custom either. When poets and artists look at the world, they often project themselves out onto objects, with the result that dead things are brought to life, and insentient things are made to feel.”²⁵¹

Above, I have suggested extending the concept of childlikeness to include broader Wang school doctrines in which strict ‘adult’ differentiations between the self and the other, and human and non-human are all but dissolved. I suggest that both of these give rise to a

²⁵⁰ This anecdote can be found at the end of the seventeenth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Zhuangzi waipian qiushui dishiqi* 莊子外篇秋水第十七.

²⁵¹ Zhu Guangqian, op. cit., p. 75.

kind of childlike consciousness and so can be viewed within the context of the late Ming discourse on childlikeness.

- Childlikeness in wider literary circles

Li Zhi's outspokenness and extreme views led to his arrest in 1602, on a charge of "daring to promote heterodox doctrine, and of misleading the people",²⁵² and he committed suicide within a month of his imprisonment. However, despite the authorities' attempts to silence him and their threats to punish anyone who published or preserved any of his work,²⁵³ the impact of his writings on the child-mind had a great deal of influence on his contemporaries, notably on the Gong'an school 公安學派 of the Yuan brothers (Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 1560-1600, Yuan Hongdao and Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 1570-1624) and contributed to a general trend in the late Ming towards the promotion of spontaneity and genuineness in writing, and the elevation of vernacular literature. This movement was to include many very influential writers of the time.

Li Zhi was the personal teacher of the Yuan brothers and, in the words of Chih-p'ing Chou, "influenced their opinions deeply and decisively both in philosophy and literature."²⁵⁴ Yuan Hongdao, the founder of the Gong'an school, espoused the theory of *xingling* 性靈, translated variously as "native sensibility"²⁵⁵ or "innate sensibility"²⁵⁶ and described by Hsu Pi-ching as a "genuine expression of personality and sensibility in poetry."²⁵⁷ The concept was not invented by Yuan, being mentioned in several of the great masterpieces of literary criticism of the past,²⁵⁸ but this idea became so fundamental to the tradition he founded that it later came to be known as the Xingling school.

²⁵² Lin Haiquan 林海權 *Li Zhi nianpu kao lue* 李贄年譜考略 (Li Zhi's life: a general study) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin cbs, 1992), p. 416 and 423.

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 416.

²⁵⁴ Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-An School*, p. 26.

²⁵⁵ See Chang and Chang, *op.cit.*, p.164.

²⁵⁶ See Chou, Chih-ping, *op.cit.* p. 11.

²⁵⁷ See Hsu Pi-ching, "Feng Meng-lung's *Treasury of Laughs*: Humorous Satire on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Culture and Society", in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (November 1998), p. 1045.

²⁵⁸ It is mentioned in all three of the following major works: the (circa.) sixth century treatise, *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 [The literary mind and the carving of dragons]; the ninth century *Shipin*

The Yuan brothers' literary circle was concerned with the pursuit of spontaneity and freshness in literature. Like Li Zhi, they believed that traditional canons of literature had become formulaic and empty and, while writing in the classical language themselves, they also championed vernacular works. In one of his most influential essays, entitled "On *Intuitive Grasp*" Yuan Hongdao discusses the literary principle of *qu* 趣 (translated by Owen as "liveliness"; by Pei-yi Wu as "taste" or "understanding"; by Lin Yutang as "zest", by James J.Y.Liu as "gusto" and by David Pollard as "flair"²⁵⁹) in much the same terms:-

"Liveliness is like the colors of a mountain, or the taste in water, or the light on flowers, or the way a beautiful woman looks. Even the master of discourse cannot put down a single word about it; only those with intuitive grasp can understand it.... Liveliness, when it is achieved from what is natural, is deep; when achieved from study, it is shallow. When one is a child, one knows nothing of the existence of liveliness, but liveliness is present everywhere. The face is never grave; the eyes are never still; the mouth prattles trying to talk; the feet leap up and down and are never still. Life's most perfect happiness is truly never greater than at this time. This is, in fact, what Mencius meant by 'not losing the heart of an infant' and what Laozi meant by being 'able to be the baby'. This is the highest grade of liveliness, its correct enlightenment, its highest doctrine."²⁶⁰

Wai-yee Li sees this as part of a 'rhetoric of spontaneity' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:-

"Although Mencius and Laozi are invoked in this passage, childhood is idealized, not so much as originary consciousness conducive to philosophical transcendence, but as the purest realization of the spontaneous joy of being..... Irrespective of the nature of the object that inspires spontaneous emotions, spontaneity, by virtue of its immediacy and intensity, is here perceived as a kind of truth."²⁶¹

詩品[Categories of poetry]; and the thirteenth century *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話[Canglang's remarks on poetry].

²⁵⁹ The last three translations are cited in Chih-ping Chou's *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*, p52. Due to the difficulty of translation of *qu*, which is implied by Yuan himself in the quote below, Chou has retained a pinyin transcription of the word.

²⁶⁰ Yuan Hongdao's preface to *Intuitive Grasp* (Hui xin ji xu 會心集序), trans. in Owen, Stephen (trans. and ed.). *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), p 811.

²⁶¹ From Li's "The Rhetoric of Spontaneity in Late-Ming Literature" in *Ming Studies* (No. 35, Aug. 1995) pp 32-52. Quotation from p. 40.

Jonathan Chaves, who describes the Gongan school as producers of “some of the most cogently argued, thought-provoking statements on literary theory in the entire Chinese tradition,”²⁶² notes the quality of truth, *zhen* 真, is extolled by all the Gongan writers and is fundamental to their doctrine: “But *zhen* means more here than ‘real’ as opposed to ‘fake’. It also implies, again, a deeper reality beneath surface appearances, and therefore is similar to *qu*.”²⁶³ This emphasis on a personalised *zhen* is immediately reminiscent of Li Zhi’s exhortation to preserve the childlike mind.

The Gongan school itself lasted for a short period (1595-1610) effectively ending with the death of Yuan Hongdao, but its influence outlived the end of the Ming dynasty. The Jingling 竟陵 school, founded by Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574-1624) and Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 (cc. 1585-1637) is usually described as the successor to the Gongan, but Chih-p’ing Chou notes the founders’ often very harsh criticism of their predecessors for a lack of profundity and overemphasis on this concept of *xingling* as well as the youngest of the Yuan brothers, Zhongdao’s own criticism of this later school.²⁶⁴ This did not prevent later historians, however, from regarding the Jingling as a direct descendant of the Gongan, even to the extent of including the biographies of the two founders as mere appendices to Yuan Hongdao’s biography in the *Official History of the Ming* (Ming shi 明史).

Late Ming writers were quick to take on board the task of incorporating *zhen* in their works. For the Gongan writers, Chaves suggests that “one of the functions of literature was to embody or communicate a perception of innate reality, through a process similar in some fashion to religious meditation.”²⁶⁵ However, much of the debate seemed to involve a striving to be more ‘true’ than anyone else. One reason for this obsession over genuineness may have been that, by this time, both Buddhism and Daoism were being absorbed by literati circles, almost as secular occupations. Li Zhi had earlier bemoaned

²⁶² “The Panoply of Images: A Reconsideration of the Literary theory of the Kung-an School” by Jonathon Chaves in *Theories of the Arts in China*, Susan Bush and Christian Murck (eds.), p. 341.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 348.

²⁶⁴ See Chih-ping Chou, op.cit. pp. 113-8.

²⁶⁵ Chaves, op.cit., p. 349.

the fact that the so called mountain recluses (shan ren 山人) were, by his time, only interested in doing business (shanggu 商賈).²⁶⁶

Similarly, in literary circles, writers were affecting a constructed reality. The twentieth century critic Wu Chengxue 吳承學 suggests that in many cases the pursuit of truth became an end in itself, in late Ming writing. “‘Truth’ (*zhen*) was the essence of the late Ming vignette, but with many late Ming writers this truth does not flow out naturally from the seat of their emotions, but is rather a purposeful expression, a seeking out, an exaggeration, even a carving out of a kind of ‘true’ sentiment, for fear of others thinking them not genuine. As such, the flavour of ‘truth’ is changed.”²⁶⁷ It is ironic that this was exactly the sort of falseness that Li Zhi had condemned so strongly. However, such interpretations only serve to demonstrate the extent to which the pursuit of genuineness had been taken up by the literati and, simultaneously, the idealisation of the childlike mind.

The influence of the ideal of the *tongxin* in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646)’s work has been noted by Hsu Pi-ching, in his study of Feng’s *Treasury of Laughs* (*Xiaofu* 笑府). Hsu states that, particularly in the preface to the collection, there is a strong underlying conviction that social ambition and success in the examinations are a threat to retaining the childlike mind.²⁶⁸ This influence, Hsu argues, further pervades the whole anthology:-

“In the *Treasury of Laughs* Feng Meng-lung provoked laughter through plays on words, suprising contrasts, and exhibitions of incongruities in the social behavior of Ming people, especially the inhabitants of Suzhou, Jiangnan’s most urbanized city of over one million people. Some of the butts of the jokes were funny because they naively failed to understand social conventions, and some because they understood the conventions too well. The latter lost their innocent ‘child’s folly’

²⁶⁶ “You yu Jiao Ruohou 又與焦弱侯” [Another letter to Jiao Ruohou] in *Fenshu*, juan 2, LZWJ Vol. 1, p.45.

²⁶⁷ Wu Chengxue, *Wan ming xiaopin yanjiu* 晚明小品研究, [Studies of late Ming vignettes] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji cbs, 1998) pp. 400-401.

²⁶⁸ Hsu Pi-ching, “Feng Meng-lung’s *Treasury of Laughs*: Humorous Satire on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Culture and Society”, in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (November 1998), p 1043.

[*tong chi*] -- Feng Menglong's version of Li Zhi's 'childlike mind' -- when they strove to gain more profit and respect than they were entitled to."²⁶⁹

In the early Qing anthology *Idle Talk under the Bean Arbour* (*Doupeng xianhua* 豆棚閑話) by the self-styled Lay Buddhist Aina (*Aina Jushi* 艾衲居士),²⁷⁰ the influence of the Taizhou school is striking. The fifth chapter, entitled "The sincere, filial and righteous beggar boy (*Xiao qi'er zhenxin xiao yi* 小乞兒真心孝義)", extols the virtues of true filiality which is not dependant on gaining high office to bring honour to one's parents, but rather consists of being attentive to their daily needs. The early paragraphs of this chapter closely mirror Taizhou doctrine, in the way they contrast genuine and natural childlike virtue with the affected and false behaviour of those 'scholars' in office:

"The world today is not a fair place, and the minds of men are unfathomable. Those clever types whose bellies are filled with the books and histories they have read, simply display an ability for mechanical posturing. By the time they reach high office or other lofty position, the initial infant mind of their childhood (*haiti chizi chuxin* 孩提赤子初心) has been completely destroyed. The things they come out with are totally unpredictable and their actions fall outwith normal social practice. In contrast, are those rustic fellows who have never studied formally, but have both feet grounded firmly in reality, and depend entirely on the azure sky; they have never heard of the Duke of Zhou, or Confucius, but even in the privacy of their own homes, have not a single improper thought or action. It is rather they who are the embodiment of the uprightness of ancient times and natural goodness for this generation."²⁷¹

This interpretation would presumably sound particularly poignant to the increasing number of literati who, like Pu Songling, had been excluded from officialdom themselves and whose writings frequently contained satirical attacks on the corrupt bureaucracy of the day.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 1043-4.

²⁷⁰ The writer has since been identified as the little-known writer Wang Mengji 王夢吉 from Hangzhou 杭州 (see Yenna Wu's entry on the anthology, p. 158, ICTCL, vol. 2).

²⁷¹ *Doupeng Xianhua*, annot. by Zhang Min 張敏 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue cbs, 1999) pp. 45-6.

- Influence in other fields

It is a premise of this thesis that, in the study of premodern China, fields such as philosophy, literature, history, literary theory and arts are connected fundamentally, and cannot be treated as wholly independent spheres. To demonstrate the wide-ranging influence that the theories of the Taizhou and the Gong'an school exerted on late Ming and early Qing China, I will very briefly survey some effects in these related fields.

Poetic and literary theory was greatly influenced by *xingling* thought and the idealisation of an innate, childlike sensibility. Karl-Heinz Pohl has noted that poetry and poetics tend to flourish at alternate periods in Chinese history, and that the Qing was “insignificant regarding poetry, but flowering in theory.”²⁷² Dominated by figures such as Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627-1703), Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711) Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) and Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673-1769), these theorists were dynamically involved with the leading writers and schools of the time, and cannot be treated as a wholly separate group. Qian Qianyi wrote a biography of Yuan Hongdao, and became actively involved in the arguments between the Gong'an and Jingling schools.²⁷³ Qian also had a close friendship with Wang Shizhen who was noted as both theorist and poet.²⁷⁴ Yuan Mei was himself a noted writer in the *biji* tradition, composing the acclaimed *What the Master did not discuss* (*Zi bu yu* 子不語).

Literary critics of late imperial China tend to be categorised, perhaps in a somewhat oversimplistic way, into two opposing schools: the archaists, following in the footsteps of the former and later seven masters, and the individualists. In the main, the theorists I have mentioned were individualists, strongly influenced by the Gong'an and Jingling schools,

²⁷² Karl-Heinz Pohl, “Ye Xie’s ‘On the Origins of Poetry’ (Yuan Shi): A Poetic of the Early Qing” in *T’oung Pao* Vol. 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1992): pp 1-32.

²⁷³ He believed the former was far superior to the latter, going so far as to call Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanqun ‘poetic devils’ (*shi yao* 詩妖).

²⁷⁴ Sun Zhimei 孫之梅 gives a systematic account of Qian’s encouragement to many younger poets, including Wang. See his *Qian Qianyi yu Ming mo Qing chu wenxue* 錢謙益與明末清初文學 [Qian Qianyi and the literature of the late Ming and early Qing] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1996) For Qian’s relationship with Wang, see pp. 384-397.

and reacting against the earlier Ming scholars.²⁷⁵ They wrote polemically about the latter's slavish imitation and clichéd style, promoting instead the importance of originality and spontaneity in poetry.

Painters, who had long subscribed to the pursuit of natural purity and spontaneity, were also adopting aspects of the literati discourse on the childlike mind. A whole separate thesis would need to be dedicated to the very complex relationship between traditional Chinese visual aesthetics and the idealisation of infancy. Daoist influences are evidently particularly strong in this field. One example of the other side of this debate would be Su Shi 蘇軾's (Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 1037-1101) noted statement that "to evaluate paintings according to the realness of their form is to judge them like a child."²⁷⁶ Li Zhi also cites this in the opening lines of his own short essay "On poetry and painting".²⁷⁷ In a collection of biographies of Qing dynasty painters, the early Qing artist whose Buddhist name was Mucun 目存, chose the appellation for himself 'the lay Buddhist with a childlike mind' (*tongxin xingzhe* 童心行者).²⁷⁸

Even prominent Confucian officials were not immune to the influence of Li Zhi. Timothy Brook has written of the non-exclusivity of the bureaucratic gentry and the left wing schools with their Buddhist leanings.²⁷⁹ One of the most direct instances of Li Zhi's influence is Zhang Dai's 張岱 (1597- c. 1679) compilation of a 283 volume history of the Ming which he entitled *A book to be hidden away in the Stone Vaults* (*Shi kui cang shu* 石匱藏書), with obvious reference to Li Zhi's banned history entitled, *A book to be hidden away* (*Cang shu* 藏書).

²⁷⁵ In his study of Ye Xie's *The Origins of Poetry* (Yuan shi 原詩), Pohl notes "remarkable similarities" to Li Zhi's views on literature, particularly to Li's article "Twenty parts of judgement" (Ershi fen shi 二十分識), despite Ye's generally more conservative stance. Pohl, op.cit., pp 22-3. Much of the *Yuan Shi* is translated in Stephen Owen's anthology *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 493-581.

²⁷⁶ "Lun hua yi xingsi jian yu ertong 論畫以形似見與兒童" from *Su Shi pingzhu huilu* 蘇詩評注彙錄 (appendix 2) *juan* 13: 1104-1105.

²⁷⁷ "Shi hua 詩畫" [On poetry and painting], *Fen Shu* *juan* 5, p. 204.

²⁷⁸ Cited in *Biographies of Ch'ing Dynasty Painters in Three Collections* Qing hua zhuanji yi sanzong fu yinde: du hua ji lue 清畫傳輯佚三種附引得；讀畫輯略 Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series Supplement No. 8, p. 32b.

²⁷⁹ This argument runs throughout Brook's *Praying for Power*. See esp. pp. 15-23 and pp. 119-126.

I have considered the extent of the influence of these doctrines among the late Ming and early Qing literati. While Pu Songling was not a member of any of the schools I have mentioned, he was on the edge of these circles and could not have been ignorant of these trends. Pu's examiner, Shi Runzhang, a man whom he held in the highest esteem throughout his life, was a noted poet, the founder of the Yushan school, and a protege of Qian Qianyi. Wang Shizhen praised Shi's poetry highly, and coined the phrase "in the south is Shi Runzhang, in the north is Song Wan 宋琬" (*Nan Shi bei Song* 南施北宋) implying that these two poets were the best in the country at that time. Wang Shizhen's acquaintance and correspondence with Pu Songling has been described by Yuan Shishuo.²⁸⁰ There is some doubt as to what extent, if at all Pu's obvious admiration for Wang was reciprocated, but they certainly met and exchanged gifts and poetry.²⁸¹ In any case, Pu wrote a poem when Wang died which demonstrates the influence the older man had on him: "Last night I still dreamed of Yuyang [Wang Shizhen]....; surely before long, our souls will swear an eternal oath."²⁸² There is, then, some direct evidence to suggest Pu was at least aspiring to be part of this intellectual scene. It is likely that one of the often overlooked side-effects of the examination system was also to help disseminate ideas between different schools and individual writers: almost like triennial academic conferences, the traveling to examination halls must have facilitated much cross-influence of different doctrines.

- Conclusion

The cult of the child which was prominent during this period was the culmination of a tradition of idealisation of infancy. This idealisation was on a philosophical level, and seems to have had little effect on the actual treatment children received. The reason why such doctrines flourished during the late Ming period was partly due to the dominance of the Wang Yangming school of the mind, and the general philosophical trends toward

²⁸⁰ Yuan Shishuo *Pu Songling shiji zhushu xin kao*, pp.187-219.

²⁸¹ Zeitlin concludes that the friendship between the obscure Pu and renowned Wang "was essentially one-sided", *Historian*, pp. 161-2.

²⁸² PSLQJ p. 1910. I have used Zeitlin's translation.

introspection and self-analysis, and partly due to the growing numbers of intellectuals who were becoming disenfranchised from the state. Within the Wang school, characteristics of spontaneity, genuineness, and naiveté were held up as both lifestyle choices and literary ideals. Some writers felt the pressure to conform and tried consciously to recreate these concepts in their work. The well-known late Ming tastes for eccentricity and individualism, combined with an increasing cynicism and distrust of officialdom, provided a receptive audience for doctrines such as those of Li Zhi.

I have chosen to extend the concept of *tongxin* to include two ideas both popular in seventeenth century China, and both vital to the discourse around the mind and the environment at that time. The first is the lack of distinction between the self and the outside world, a prominent aspect of Wang school doctrine, and one reinforced by eclectic trends of the time. The second is the projection of human consciousness and sentiment onto natural phenomena which, in the extreme, results in a lack of distinction between the human and non-human realms. According to the insights of twentieth century child psychology both of these are concordant with a child's view of the environment. In the next chapter, I will consider these two ideas in turn, looking firstly at the possibilities of literary interpretations of these philosophical doctrines, and then specifically at how they are manifested within the *Liaozhai* stories themselves.

The influence of doctrines on the childlike mind, on genuine spontaneity, and on innate sensibility could be perceived in almost all spheres of intellectual life in the late Ming and early Qing periods.²⁸³ Links between childlikeness and creativity are readily made. The twentieth century critic Wang Guowei 王國維, in his acclaimed *Renjian ci hua* 人間詞話

²⁸³ Members of the medical establishment are the exception, and seem unaffected by the cult of the child current in other literati circles, maintaining their own views on the nature of childhood: "as the infant makes the transition from the perilous and tainted materiality of gestation and infancy, the significant markers of its emerging human nature have more to do with cognitive and emotional faculties rather than moral ones. There is no strong polarity between body and spirit here, and medical wisdom suggested that infancy was not to be associated with any morally privileged innocence such as philosophers claimed for the 'childlike mind'. Even further, medical experts viewed the optimum patterns of a child's growth as distorted by the intense striving for moral and intellectual development that Confucian pedagogy encouraged." Furth, "From birth to birth," p. 177.

(Conversations about *ci* poetry), states: “*Ci* writers can be considered among those who have not lost their childlike heart (*chizi zhi xin*).”²⁸⁴ A recent article has analysed a similar childlikeness in the poetry of the Song dynasty poet Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127-1206).²⁸⁵

Of course, such comparisons between creativity and childlikeness are by no means exclusive to the Chinese discourse. Artists and writers in western traditions too have frequently invoked a return to childhood as the ideal state for creativity.²⁸⁶ Freud has wondered: “Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?”²⁸⁷ An intercultural comparison of implications of linking childlikeness with art in this way would be a very interesting subject for further study.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will attempt to explore aspects of childlikeness in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*, and in Pu Songling’s other writings. Specifically, I will address three main areas: childlike consciousness, naiveté and folly.

²⁸⁴ *Renjian cihua*, juan 1, no. 16.

²⁸⁵ “Tongxin yu Chengzhai ti 童心與誠齋體” [The childlike mind and the Chengzhai style of poetry] by Li Lienan 黎烈南 in *Wenxue yichan* issue 5, 2000.

²⁸⁶ One of many examples is the artist Paul Klee, who wrote in his diary in 1902: “To have to begin with what is smallest is as precarious as it is necessary. I will be like a newborn child, knowing nothing about Europe, nothing at all.” Cited in Rudolf Arnheim’s *Art and Visual Perception: a psychology of the creative eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 120.

²⁸⁷ Sigmund Freud “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” reprinted in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern* Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds) (New York: McGraw-Hill inc., 1995) p. 47.

Chapter 4 ~ A childlike consciousness

In this chapter, I will consider two of the concepts I have identified above as indicative of a childlike consciousness: the non-differentiation of self and the external world, and the projection of human qualities onto the non-human world. Both ideas are recurrent themes in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*. The dissolution of these boundaries is a salient feature within the collection and helps effect the ‘strangeness’ of the tales, particularly for a modern readership, but also, read within the seventeenth-century philosophical context, it reflects contemporary ideological trends and contributes to what I have termed the childlikeness of the *Liaozhai*.

Section A ~ The all-encompassing self

In this section, I will consider the way in which the proposition that nothing exists outside one’s mind (*wu xinwai zhi wu*), was adapted by members of the artistic and literary world, and specifically by Pu Songling. It is important to remember that, despite his occasional digressions into questions of cosmology and ontology, the majority of Pu’s writings were primarily addressing literary themes.²⁸⁸ However, in a life structured principally by the continual examinations, where the major texts were the Song-annotated Confucian classics, I believe it is hard, if not impossible, to dismiss the influence exerted by one field on the other.

Literary interpretations of this blurring of boundaries between self and the outside world can take many forms. Judith Zeitlin, in a discussion on obsession in Chinese literature, notes that by the late Ming, the importance of the obsession lay no longer in the object of devotion, but in gaining a greater understanding of oneself. “In this most radical equation,

²⁸⁸ Two exceptions to this are “*Tian hui yi xu* 天會意序” [A preface to *The harmony of heaven and the will*] and “*Wang Rushui Wen xin ji xu* 王如水問心集序” [A preface to *An anthology on questions of the mind*, by Wang Rushui] (PSLQJ p.1036 and p.1045 respectively). These two short prefaces address questions of cosmology and the nature of heaven. However, nothing in either article is very original or innovative, and for the most part both are composed of various concepts drawn from other philosophical works.

the boundary between subject and object has dissolved.”²⁸⁹ In this case, the agent for dissolution of the boundaries is the obsessive fantasy of the protagonist.

A similar fluidity in boundaries between the self and the other has been noted by Keith McMahon in his influential studies of vernacular fiction of the late Ming and early Qing periods. “In the *xiaoshuo* of this period, there is a continuously elaborated experimentation with the vicissitudes of the self, which is portrayed in numerous aspects of containment and abandon.”²⁹⁰ McMahon defines the self as the physical body and relates this fluidity to a rebelliousness on the part of the writers against Confucian ideals of self-containment. In this thesis, I am more concerned with the mental transgression of boundaries and consider this as a reflection of Wang Yangming doctrines on the supremacy of the mind over the external world.

Travel writing perhaps lends itself particularly to the contemplation of one’s relationship with one’s natural surroundings, partly in answer to the perpetual question about the degree of autobiography in any form of travel writing.²⁹¹ A comment by the late Ming travel writer, Guo Yingkui 郭應奎, that “brilliance lies in the heart, not in the scenery”, is indicative of this general trend to internalise the outside world.²⁹² Another travel writer, Xu Hongzu 徐宏祖 (1587-1641), better known by his appellation Xiaoke 霞客, describes in his memoirs how he stopped off at Stone Gate Temple and received a divination which stated “Do not separate your mind from the surroundings.”²⁹³ Buddhist influence on these travelers, who often took temporary lodgings in temples, is clear.²⁹⁴ It is an interesting

²⁸⁹ Zeitlin, “The petrified heart” p. 9.

²⁹⁰ *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Fiction* Keith McMahon (Leiden and New York: E.J.Brill, 1988) p.11.

²⁹¹ It seems to me, for instance, that much of the appeal of modern western travel writing comes as much from a desire to learn about the author as a curiosity about the places (s)he is visiting, and the two are rarely distinct entities.

²⁹² See Guo’s essay “Notes on a trip to Mt. Heng” (Hengyue tong youji 衡嶽同遊記) from *Gujin tushu jicheng* 196:3.

²⁹³ *Xu Xiaoke Youji* 徐霞客遊記 {The Travel Diaries of Xu Xiaoke} (Shanghai: Shanghai guji cbs, 1980) p. 167.

²⁹⁴ See eg. Ward, *Xu Xiaoke (1587-1641)* (Surrey: Curzon, 2001) pp. 172-177.

paradox that such writers could go to such lengths in search of new scenery and natural surroundings, while still adhering to ideas that one's mind encompasses all.

This concept would seem to sit naturally within writings on the strange, where the removal of clear distinctions between reality and illusion emphasise the abnormal. Freud has argued that this removal of boundaries between the real and imaginary can effect what he calls the 'uncanny' in writing. "The infantile element in this," he warns, "which also dominates the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality."²⁹⁵ However, for a Chinese readership such removal of boundaries is more common and certainly not limited to writings on the strange.

- *Wu xinwai zhi wu* in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*

In what follows, I will argue that the philosophical ideas of internalisation of the outside world form the background for those *Liaozhai* tales which are centred around illusion: the enactment of the mind's fantasies and daydreams, as narrative. The usefulness of this concept as a narrative device is clear. The stories I deal with here all concern an illusory journey which takes place within the protagonist's mind. The stories generally conclude with a reaffirmation of a modified reality. To facilitate this progression, a literary construct engenders the illusion. Most commonly this takes the form of a dream, but it can also occur through a comatose state, a hallucination caused by alcohol, or an illusory world projected by Daoist arts. By refusing to demarcate real from imaginary, Pu Songling has successfully created a single illusory world in which truth (*zhen* 真) can only be defined in terms of being true to oneself, rather than in contrast to illusion (*huan* 幻).

The nature of and relationship between reality and illusion is crucial to the *Liaozhai zhiyi*. The vast majority of the tales include some form of supernatural element, whether a plant or animal spirit or a human ghost, and these are invariably depicted as vividly as the

²⁹⁵ Freud, "The Uncanny", in *Art and Literature*, p. 367.

human protagonists. In fact, fantastic elements are depicted so realistically that the distinctions between human and non-human characters are negligible and thus the very boundary separating the two worlds is dissolved. Lu Xun noted this ambiguity in his comments on the collection: “even flower-spirits and fox-fairies appear human and approachable; but just as we forget that they are not human, the author introduces some strange happening to remind us that they are supernatural after all.”²⁹⁶

In what follows I will first consider some of the different narrative devices Pu Songling uses to achieve this merging of the real and the fantastic into a single illusory world. I will then discuss the nature of this world by looking specifically at Pu’s portrayal of non-human elements in the *Liaozhai*.

- Dreams

Judith Zeitlin has noted that eighty or so of the *Liaozhai* tales involve a dream, and that in around twenty-five it is a major theme.²⁹⁷ Dreams are, by their very nature, an internalisation of features of the external world. When they are included in fictional narratives, with an omniscient narrator, the transgression of the barriers of the inner and the outer becomes almost inevitable.

The dream mode is often employed as a literary device to engender a sense of magic or crossing of boundaries. As such, writers in the *zhiguai* tradition are especially prone to adopt it. It is not exclusive to them, however, and is common in many types of fiction which attempt to play with these limitations, often included either as a justification for the ‘strangeness’ of the plot, or as an appeal against the injustice of reality. Moreover, a widespread interest in dreams and their interpretation seems to peak in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which not only saw vast amounts of references in

²⁹⁶ Lu Xun, p. 236.

²⁹⁷ Zeitlin, op.cit, p. 135 and pp. 138-40.

literature, but also the emergence of encyclopediae and handbooks on dream analysis, for general use.²⁹⁸

Dreams are explorations of fantasy and imagination. According to Freud, one of their principal functions is the fulfilment of wishes, often wishes conceived in earliest childhood.²⁹⁹ As such, they allow our imagination to act out an idealised version of our life, and temporarily ignore or refute the problematic reality of our surroundings. The function of this subconscious process is parallel in effect to that of the conscious tradition of venting one's indignation by writing fiction, discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Both are to some degree escapist solutions, since neither confronts reality directly, but both have positive effects by providing a space and a freedom to satisfy mental needs and aspirations within and yet without the social and moral constraints of the external world.

Fantasies like these are played out in many instances of *Liaozhai* dream narratives. Unable to deal with some aspect of reality, the protagonist reverts to an 'other world' to fulfil a desire, or avenge a crime. One well-known tale, "Crickets" (Cuzhi 促織; 3:25), provides an example of this. Here the transgressive nature of a dream is used to fulfil a young boy's wish and bring about a happy ending. Cheng Ming is ordered to supply crickets for the cricket fights popular at the imperial court. Refusing to extort money from the peasants to purchase one, he finds one himself with the help of a fortune-teller. Unfortunately, that night his nine-year-old son opens the pot and the cricket escapes and is crushed to death. When his mother scolds him, the boy runs off, falls down a well and nearly dies. He remains in a trance. Meanwhile, a small insignificant-looking cricket hops on to Cheng's arm. Much to everyone's surprise, the cricket defeats all the other prize specimens, and Cheng is rewarded highly. A year later, his son regains consciousness, saying he has been dreaming he was a prize-fighting cricket.

²⁹⁸ See Zeitlin, pp. 135 ff., for a comprehensive survey of the use of the dream in late Ming and early Qing fictional and non-fictional works.

²⁹⁹ See Freud's *The Interpretations of Dreams*, James Strachey (trans.) A. Richards (ed.) (London: Penguin, 1991), esp. pp. 200-213 and pp. 277-313.

One reason for the popularity of this tale is the ageless allure of its main themes: criticism of official corruption, and the defeat of the strong by the weak. However, it also provides a good example of the author's frequent practice of embedding a dream narrative within a 'real' plot, and the simultaneous interplay between the two. The intensity of the young boy's distress at being scolded by his mother causes him to remain in a seemingly unconscious state. In his mind, however, he is playing out the fantasy of undoing his mistake, in Freudian terms a wish-fulfilment. The lack of distinction in the narrative between illusion and reality allows this wish to be fulfilled simultaneously in the 'real life' of the story.

Chinese tradition allows for a wider interpretation of the functions of dreams than the Freudian model. In the late sixteenth century, Chen Shiyuan 陳士元 in his *Treatise on Dream Interpretation* suggested the two main functions of dream are prophecy (*zhao* 兆) and illusion (*huan* 幻). Judith Zeitlin summarises Chen's definition of these: "The first holds that dreams predict the future and thus reveal the workings of fate... The second approach treats the dream as a means to question the boundaries between illusion and reality."³⁰⁰

Conventionally, of course, dreams end when the dreamer wakes up. In the *Liaozhai* tales, however, the boundaries between dream and reality are blurred in such a way that the 'real world' is modified in some way as a result of the 'unreal'.

Appended to his translation of the *Liaozhai zhiyi*, Herbert Giles cites a passage from an essay by Spencer:³⁰¹ "The distinction so easily made by us between our life in dreams and our real life is one which the savage recognises in but a vague way; and he cannot express even that distinction which he perceives..... From this inadequacy of his language it not only results that he cannot truly represent this difference to others, but also that he cannot

³⁰⁰ Zeitlin, p. 138.

³⁰¹ Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a British philosopher, who applied evolutionary theory to the study of societies.

truly represent it to himself.”³⁰² While to a twenty first century reader there are obviously major problems with conceptualising ‘the savage’ in this way, if we substitute the word ‘child’ for it much of the rationale remains the same.

The use of dream in a short story engenders both a flexibility of plot and convergence of the real and the imaginary. One tale in which the lack of boundaries between the internal and the external is clearly demonstrated is “The Painted Wall” (Huabi 畫壁; 1:06). Although the protagonist in this story is not strictly speaking asleep during the narration of the dream sequence, the daydream functions in exactly the same way: the state of sleep is simply replaced by a comatosis.

Meng Longtan from Jiangxi is staying in the capital with a scholar named Zhu. They happen to enter a Buddhist temple, empty except for one old monk, who gives them a tour. On the eastern wall is a painting in which a girl with a child’s hairstyle is smiling. Zhu becomes transfixed with this, until his body suddenly floats up, as if riding on a cloud, and he enters the wall. Realising he has left the mortal world, Zhu follows the girl into her chamber and they make love. In the background, an old monk is preaching to a large crowd. The girl warns him to remain quiet and she returns the following night, and the next. When her friends discover the lovers’ secret they tease her about losing her virginity, saying she should dress her hair in the style of a married woman now. That evening, an envoy arrives to arrest the mortal, but Zhu escapes by hiding under the bed. Meng wonders where his friend has disappeared to, and is told by the monk that he has gone to listen to a Buddhist sermon. They see Zhu hiding in the mural, Meng calls out to him to hurry back, and Zhu returns. In the mural, the girl’s hair is now that of a married woman.

As an explanation for this transference of illusion and reality, the monk states: “Illusion arises from oneself; how could I explain it to you?” The mind in ‘The Painted Wall’ is

³⁰² Spencer’s Essays Vol. 3, pp. 103-4, cited in Giles, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, Appendix 2, p. 488.

not just a passive participant in the boundary-crossing but is rather both participant in and creator of the illusions which are perceived. The concluding commentary by the Historian of the Strange³⁰³ suggests that these external illusions are also a reflection of the inner mind, and the appearance of the external is entirely shaped by the fundamental nature of that which is internal: "If a man has a lustful mind, then filthy scenes will arise: if a man has a filthy mind, then terrifying scenes will arise. When a bodhisattva instructs the ignorant, a thousand illusions are created at once, but all are set in motion by the human mind itself. The monk was a bit too keen to see results. But it's a pity that upon hearing his words, Zhu did not reach enlightenment, unfasten his hair, and withdraw to the mountains."

The narrative structure of this tale has been discussed at length in, and serves as the concluding chapter to, Zeitlin's *Historian of the Strange*. In her seminal work, Zeitlin argues that the *Liaozhai* signifies a new stage of discourse about 'the strange'. She suggests that this tale "provides the greatest insight into the complex play with boundaries that helps engender the strange in *Liaozhai*."³⁰⁴ It is undoubtedly the case that the boundary-shifting which occurs in this, and likewise in a large number of the *Liaozhai* tales, adds to the "strangeness" of the collection for a modern readership. However, I would suggest that Pu Songling's transgressing of the boundaries of the inner-mind and the outside world is also very intimately related to the contemporary philosophical discourse outlined above and as such can equally well be seen as a reflection of Pu's own position within this debate, as much as his unique extension of the contemporary theme of the strange.

³⁰³ This epithet, (*Yishi shi* 異史氏) as used by Pu to comment on a total of 195 of the *Liaozhai* tales. Its obvious yet satirical echo of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145-87? B.C.) commentaries as Grand Historian 太史公 of the *Historical Records* 史記, has been discussed by many scholars (see, e.g., Zeitlin pp. 1-3). In his unpublished doctoral dissertation, Marlon Hom states, "In these commentaries, Pu Songling exhibited himself as both a serious writer and a humorist. On the one side he could be a subjective and critical commentator like Sima Qian, but on the other side he could be a lighthearted teaser manipulating the commentary structure to express satire and humor." (University of Washington, 1979).

³⁰⁴ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange* p. 183.

- dreams of the other world

Karl Kao has noted that one of the functions of dreams in Chinese narrative is to create a space to facilitate communication between the living and the dead.³⁰⁵ While many, if not most, of the *Liaozhai* tales deal in some way with a redefinition of the boundary between life and death, a significant number focus specifically on trips to the Underworld, and with the court of king Yama (yanluo 閻羅). The Taiwanese scholar Yang Changnian 楊昌年, in his thematic classification of the anthology, has identified twenty-two tales which deal with this theme of the afterlife.³⁰⁶ The ease with which Buddhist-Daoist concepts are adopted for use as a narrative device, while by no means unique to these stories, is in itself good evidence for the syncretism of the age. The journeys usually take place within a dream, as a hallucination, or after 'death' and end with a return to the mortal world. Thus, as in the stories discussed above, the mind of the protagonist serves as a framework for the events of the story and can also be seen as an extension of the exploration of the nature of mentality and illusion. Themes of morality and justice are most common, and the net result of the mental journey is often a moral readjustment of another of the characters.

In the official sphere, the supernatural of the afterlife is portrayed as an idealised version of the seventeenth century bureaucracy, whose corruption Pu so hated. Justice in the court of Yama is supreme, and not subject to the whims of the judges. This is perhaps demonstrated best in the story of Li Boyan (李伯言; 2:28). When Li is in charge of the court in the Underworld, he dispenses justice impartially according to the rules, until a

³⁰⁵ See Karl S.Y.Kao, in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 209.

³⁰⁶ The tales he lists are: "Examination for the post of city-god" (Kao chenghuang 考城隍; 1:01) "Geng Shiba" (Geng shiba 耿十八; 1:58) "Zhang Cheng" (Zhang Cheng 張誠; 2:09) "Li Boyan" (Li Boyan 李伯言; 2:28) "Yama" (Yanluo 閻羅; 2:32) "The censor of Fengdu" (Fengdu yushi 酆都御史; 3:30) "A sequel to *Yellow Sorghum*" (xu Huangliang 續黃粱; 3:37) "The drunkard" (jiu kuang 酒狂; 3:56) "The cloth merchant" (bu ke 布客; 4:06) "King Yama" (Yan wang 閻王; 4:16) "General Ku" (Ku jiangjun 庫將軍; 4:41) "Kaobisi" (Kaobisi 考幣司; 4:68) "Yama" (Yanluo 閻羅; 4:69) "The death of Yama" (Yanluo hong 閻羅薨; 5:34) "Yama's banquet" (Yanluo yan 閻羅宴; 5:50) "Official envoys" (zaoli 郭安; 6:58) "Guo An" (Guo An 郭安; 6:69) "Wang Huolang" (Wang Huolang 王貨郎; 7:08) "Wang Da" (Wang Da 王大; 8:20) "Wang Shi" (Wang Shi 王十; 8:25) "Mr. Yuanshao" (Yuanshao xiansheng 元少先生; 8:46) and "Li Tansi" (Li Tansi 李檀斯; 8:63) *Liaozhai zhiyi yanjiu* 聊齋誌異研究 [Studies of *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*] (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1996), p. 69.

friend of his is to be tried and his instinctive reaction is to protect him. According to the Confucian tradition, whereby the sage himself indicated that personal relationships were in some cases above the law, this reaction is entirely justifiable.³⁰⁷ However, immediately he harbours these subjective thoughts, the flames in the courtroom leap up to ensure objectivity in the legal process. In the end, on checking the facts, his friend was in fact guilty of a lesser crime and so the punishment could indeed be lenient. Later, on his return to the mortal world, his friend came to thank him for his judgment, but Li simply shrugged it off, saying that the law could not be subjective.

In this way, the constructed realm of the afterlife provides a fantasy world for the victim of the injustices of the mortal world. Official structures and hierarchies are often very similar, in these two worlds. This is particularly apparent in the *Liaozhai* tales which deal with the exam system. A number of tales deal with scholars who have failed in the exams, only to pass them in their dreams. If we consider dream as wish-fulfilment, then the examination is the obvious setting for the majority of Pu Songling's scholar protagonists. "Examination for the post of city deity" [考城隍; 1:1] is the first tale in the collection.³⁰⁸ Opening the anthology, it is reasonable to assume that the themes it deals with will be recurrent throughout the collection and this is indeed the case. 'The Examination' is the account of a stipend student, Song Tao 宋燾 who, while ill in bed, is apparently summoned to the exam hall to take the provincial level examination. When he arrives, it appears to be the imperial palace and there is another scholar already seated at one of two desks. The two men are each given a question paper, they each submit an essay and Song's is praised by all the officials sitting round. It is only when he is offered the post of city deity of a town in Henan province that he realises he has entered the after-life and immediately begs to be allowed to return to the mortal world and wait until his mother has died, so that he can look after her. The officials check in the records and discover

³⁰⁷ This prioritising of personal relationship over legal responsibility is suggested by Confucius' affirmation that if a boy stole a sheep, his father should cover up for him rather than report him to the magistrate. (see *Analects* 13:18).

³⁰⁸ Extensive work by Allan Barr among others has proved that, while the ordering of many of the tales is open to question, this story appears first in all editions and versions of the collection. See, for example Barr's article "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*", and his unpublished PhD dissertation.

Song's mother has nine years to live, so they allow the other scholar, a man named Zhang 張, to take the post for the duration on condition that Song takes it over immediately after the nine years are up. Song returns to life, to care for his mother. After her funeral, he first pays respects to his wife's family and then returns to immortality.

This story implies that the structure of the examination system is duplicated in the after-life, and that immortal officials are awarded their posts in the same way as their mortal counterparts achieve theirs. Song had been seriously ill, when suddenly in a dream he gains recognition for his literary skills in an exam in the after-life.³⁰⁹ The fulfilment of this dream again involves the dissolution of boundaries between the two worlds, as Song is permitted to make the return journey to fulfil his traditional Confucian duty of filial piety, but is on contract to return once again after nine years.

The boundaries between life and death can also be crossed by extreme emotion. Geng Shiba (耿十八; 1:58), realising that he is seriously ill and near death, tells his wife that she is free to decide for herself whether or not to remain celibate after his death. However, his insincerity in this seemingly generous offer is apparent when he becomes indignant at her admission that she would have no choice but to remarry, for financial reasons. He rebukes her for her heartlessness, and then dies. Initially unaware that he is already dead, he sees his name listed on a passing cart and boards it. They drive towards "A place to recall your hometown (*si xiang di* 思鄉地)". Familiar with this expression, Geng gradually comes to realise he is now a ghost, and weeps for his elderly mother who will be helpless and alone if his wife does indeed remarry. The convoy drives towards the platform known as "looking at your homeland (*wang xiang tai* 望鄉臺)" and Geng is called to go up first. He sees his home and courtyard, but the area around his wife's chamber is not clear, and he becomes upset. Seeing his distress, a man in short sleeves who introduces himself as an artisan proposes that they escape. Geng is afraid, but plucks up the courage to follow the artisan and they both jump off the platform unnoticed. Geng

³⁰⁹Frustrated scholars who are denied success in the mortal world but gain it in the afterlife is a fairly common trope in the *Liaozhai*. See for example, the tale "Scholar Ye" discussed in Chapter 2.

then erases his own name from the list on the vehicle, and the artisan leads him back to his corpse where he revives. On regaining consciousness his family see him drink a huge amount of water, then run out, bow, run back, and lie down again. Geng explains this bizarre behaviour by saying that he was saying farewell to the artisan. Within a few days, he makes a full recovery, but despises his wife and refuses to sleep with her.

In this tale, it is Geng's grief and disappointment with his wife's behaviour which facilitates his re-crossing of the threshold into the mortal world. The structure of this tale contrasts the two worlds neatly, describing the traditional platform from which one can view the other and say a last farewell, but which, in 'normal' practice, does not allow for transgression between the two. The resultant effect in the real world of the events in the illusory world is that Geng refuses any further sexual relations with his wife.

There are many psychological explanations of why we need to dream, including wish-fulfilment and problem-solving. The child's ambitions which can never be realised in the real world can always be satisfactorily achieved in his dream. The dream creates a fantasy world which is controlled by the dreamer (at least the dreamer's subconscious). Not only can dreaming provide a temporary feeling of pleasure, it also serves as an outlet for pent-up emotions. Pu Songling described his writing of the *Liaozhai* stories as providing a similar release for him and, in the author's mind, the creation of fiction enables just such a fantasy to be played out. Equally the creation, within the illusory realm, of an idealised version of the external world, in which corrupt examiners and unfaithful lovers are punished and true scholars are recognised, allows Pu to explore his own visions of an ideal world and escape from the cruel reality of his successive failures in the exams.

The flexibility between states of dreaming and waking in Pu Songling's writings is reminiscent of Zhuangzi's well-known butterfly dream metaphor and his timeless

conclusion: "I do not know whether it was me dreaming that I was a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming that it was me."³¹⁰

- Alcoholic stupors

Drunkenness is another literary conceit, and as such is employed widely in all traditional Chinese genres. As with many literary traditions, a cup of wine is almost seen as an essential accessory for a scholar. Innumerable drinking games were involved to some degree with literary composition. Since more often than not the subject of Chinese literature is the lives of the literati, wine features prominently in fictional works. The Daoist fantasy of liberation through drunkenness is also a cliché. Getting drunk was often a deliberate means employed by artists to achieve spontaneity and genuineness, "to follow nature and discard artificiality".³¹¹ Pu's own ambivalence towards alcohol is demonstrated in the heavily ironic tale "The wine bug" (酒蟲; 4:02) in which an alcoholic is cured of his addiction, but is plunged into poverty. The *Historian of the Strange* comments "Downing a picul of wine a day caused him no financial losses; not drinking even a cupful, however, he became poorer and poorer."³¹²

In many of the *Liaozhai* tales, alcohol seems to facilitate access to the supernatural world. In the tale "The Three Immortals" (三仙; 8:23) a scholar on his way to the provincial exam meets three graduates, and they all get drunk together. To amuse themselves they choose themes at random and each write an essay on one. When the scholar awakes from a drunken stupor, he discovers he has been asleep on a hillside and his drinking partners

³¹⁰ This anecdote is from the second of the inner chapters of *Zhuangzi* "On the equality of things" 齊物論 part 7. I have used Wing-tsit Chan's translation, from *Sourcebook*, p. 190.

³¹¹ The 8th century painter Wang Xia is renowned for painting in an alcoholic stupor. See eg., Dusan Pajin's essay on "Symbolism of Chinese Gardens," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 34, 1996, p. 18.

³¹² This ambiguity, which seems to me to be the whole crux of this tale, was evidently too much for the eighteenth century commentator Dan Minglun, who ignores any implied irony and firmly condemns alcoholic excess in his remarks on this tale: "It is quite common for a man's alcohol tolerance to be initially not very high, and so he does not watch how much he drinks; as he continues, he drinks over a picul a day, and still seems not to be affected; when he next tests out his limits, he has become a bottomless pit! If this situation continues like that, he'll be dead before long. Thus we can see that Liu's bug was his downfall, and was not a blessing." LZZY p. 917.

have vanished, but their essays are still in his pocket. Sure enough, when he comes to take the exam, the themes they had chosen come up, and the scholar wins first place. In “The drinking companion” (酒友; 2:04) a shared love of alcohol forms the basis for a deep friendship between a fox and the human protagonist. The fox advises his friend on financial matters, and is treated like one of the family. However, when the human dies, the fox never visits the family again.

Alcohol once again provides the link to the fantasy world in “A fox marries off his daughter” (狐嫁女; 1:21). The male protagonist, drinking with his friends, takes up a bet to stay overnight in a haunted mansion. He goes in and is just falling asleep when several people enter and invite him to a wedding banquet. He joins in, and pockets a golden goblet as proof of his experience. Some time after leaving the mansion, he is invited for dinner to a nobleman’s house, where he discovers that an identical goblet is missing and returns it, demonstrating again that the boundary-crossing between the real and the supernatural is two-way, and extends to physical objects.

A more negative portrayal of the effects of alcohol is described in the tale ‘The drunkard’ (Jiu kuang 酒狂; 3:56), but here again intoxicated states form the bridge from the natural to the supernatural. The protagonist, Miao Yongding, is frequently shunned by his friends and family because of his excessive drinking. One day he is invited to a party at his uncle’s house, where he becomes drunk, begins making jokes, offends a guest and causes a big fight. He has to be carried home and, on arrival, ceases breathing in a drunken stupor. The narrative then continues with Miao’s hallucinations, similar to the dream narratives discussed above. He sees a man approach, tie him up and take him to a splendid yamen. He only realises he is in the Underworld when he meets a deceased uncle. His uncle bribes a guard and secures his freedom, although this does not prevent Miao from getting drunk again with the ghost of an old friend, offending him and having a fight, only to be rescued once again by his uncle. He is allowed home by virtue of a deposit that his uncle pays on his behalf, and Miao promises to pay the rest ten days after he gets home. Having re-entered the mortal world, banking on his uncle being unwilling

to expose his corruption to the officials in the underworld, Miao never pays the money he owes and gradually returns to his old ways. The story ends when one day, extremely drunk and abusive, he falls down dead with the shout 'there's your repayment'.

As in the previous stories where alcohol was portrayed positively, Miao's drunken stupors allow the transgression of boundaries between life and death, and also the progression of the tale towards the moral outcome.

In the *Liaozhai*, intoxication with alcohol has a similar effect to extreme tiredness. In both states the senses are dulled and external influences are therefore minimalised. As such, both states are highly subjective and enable illusory journeys within the framework of the protagonist's mind. In Pu Songling's stories, the process is complicated because, just as factors from the 'real' world have created the 'unreal', the 'unreal' is also allowed to modify the 'real,' and so the protagonist can retain physical trophies from his experience.

Becoming drunk is an adult's way to escape from the pressures of the real world and the constrictions of social hierarchies. It provides one with the opportunity and the excuse to release one's inhibitions and ignore the consequences. Given the strong mental associations for Chinese readers between literary activity and alcohol, it is a particularly fitting way for the scholar protagonists in the stories to enter the world of illusion. Unlike the dream, intoxication is often a more conscious attempt to enter a fantastic world. Similarly with the dream, in the *Liaozhai* borders between sober reality and drunken fantasy are never firmly fixed.

- Daoist illusions

A third narrative device which is employed in various of the tales to engender the merging of boundaries between reality and illusion, is magic. Sometimes a mere entertainer (eg. 'Magical arts' Xi shu 戲術; 2:23) the *Liaozhai* magician is more often a Daoist practitioner, whose skills hinge on these concepts of reality and illusion and their

mutual non-exclusivity. The popularity of Daoist mysticism, and familiarity with maxims such as “When the self and the other [or the ‘this’ and the ‘that’] lose their contrariness [mutually exclusive opposition] we have the very essence of the *Dao*,”³¹³ allowed a practitioner to assume that his audience was ready to accept such ambiguities.

Two *Liaozhai* tales which are often anthologised as a pair, “Stealing Peaches” (Tou tao 偷桃; 1:13) and “Planting Pears” (Zhong li 種梨; 1:14) are perhaps the best known examples of this type of illusion. The first involves a rope-trick in which a man asks his young son to climb up a rope into a garden paradise, steal a peach and throw it down to him. Suddenly the rope falls down and the boy’s severed limbs are scattered on the ground. Weeping, his father asks the crowd for money for the funeral. After a large sum has been collected, he produces his son, live and well, from a basket, and the onlookers realise it has all been an illusion. In the second tale a poor Daoist priest, angered when a fruit-seller refuses to give him a pear, creates an illusory pear tree and as a crowd gathers, he hands the fruit from it around. When there is none left, he hacks down the tree and walks off. After the crowd has dispersed, the fruit-seller discovers that all his pears have vanished and one handle of his barrow has been sawn off. The Daoist is nowhere to be seen.

These stories differ in narrative structure from those involving dreams or alcohol, as here there is an external agent facilitating the illusion. The state of transition between the states of reality and non-reality, rather than resulting from a dulling of senses, is instead engendered by extensive training in the Daoist arts. Daoist ideas of reality and illusion are far too complex to be covered here. However, in both of these tales the narrative voice is that of a spectator: in the first it is (rarely, in the *Liaozhai*) narrated in the first person; in the second it is narrated through the eyes of the fruit-seller. As such, both employ the same illusory narrative, and in each case the illusion results in a physical change to the external reality.

³¹³ From the second of the inner chapters of *Zhuangzi* part 3. I have followed de Bary’s translation in rendering *bi* 彼 [lit ‘that’] as ‘the other’ and *shi* 是 [lit ‘this’] as ‘the self’. See *Sources of Chinese Tradition* Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 70.

By the recurrent use of motifs of dream, coma, intoxication, and magic, a sense of illusion is created in Pu Songling's writing, in which the boundaries between the inner self and the outer world disappear. The narratives discussed above take the form of an illusory journey within the mind of the protagonist. The journey ends where it began, but usually with the protagonist now carrying some concrete symbol of the other. The boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred both for the protagonists in the tales, and for the reader. More importantly for this discussion, it is as if the world external to the protagonist exists only in as much as it is useful for or pertains to the protagonist, recalling both Wang Yangming's metaphor of the tree blossom in Nanzhen, and also the child's outlook on the world. Both concern a perceived, or signified world which exists only in so much as there is a protagonist to engender it, and be changed by it.

Section B ~ The humanisation of Nature

The personification of Nature is a recurring trope in literature of most if not all cultures and the Chinese literary tradition is no exception. Santangelo notes the extent to which, in Chinese literature, certain features of the natural world are used allegorically for human emotion: "The humanization of Nature..... deeply influences its perception so that it is often identified with one's sensation or image of it."³¹⁴

In addition to anecdotal stories and fables in the early Daoist texts, personification of animals and plants was common as early as the Han dynasty prose poems (*fu* 賦) and ballads (*yuefu* 樂府). 'The withered fish', included in Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩's *Anthology of Yuefu ballads* 樂府詩集³¹⁵ exemplifies this phenomenon. The comic overtones of the original have been preserved well in Anne Birrell's translation:

"A withered fish by a river wept.

³¹⁴ "Literary Conceptions of Nature" by Paolo Santangelo, in Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung (eds.) *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 652.

³¹⁵ Compiled in the twelfth century, this is the most comprehensive anthology of *Yuefu* to date. Biographical details of the compiler, Guo Maoqian, are scant -- see entry on *Yuefu shiji* in *ICTCL*, Vol 1 p. 964.

Too late for remorse now!
He wrote a letter to carp and bream
Warning them: Mind how you come and go!”³¹⁶

In his analytical survey of pre-Tang *zhiguai* stories, Robert Campany identifies a whole category of animal tales which are heavily influenced by Buddhist and what he describes as Heaven and Humanity doctrines (*tianren heyi* 天人合一): “in these texts, humans are depicted as standing in moral relationships with animals, and animals find their way into the stories as anomalous creatures not, typically, because of their hybrid quality but because of human-like behavior that seemingly suggests their membership, with humans, in a single moral community.”³¹⁷ Campany cites examples whereby animals repay debts of gratitude to humans, exact revenge on humans who have harmed them, and even avenge the death of a human benefactor.

The Six Dynasties collection *New Songs of a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉台新咏) compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-583) developed the concept of personification of objects, creating the poetic genre known as ‘composition on an object’ (*yongwu* 咏物). Within the collection it is common for natural objects to be inscribed with human-like qualities. In the introduction to her translation of the anthology, Birrell states:

“The most original feature of Southern Dynasties love poetry in the context of its tradition is the technique of erotic personification. Prohibited by taboo and poetic decorum from portraying sexual love, the court poets found an ingenious way to circumvent these restraints. If a man was forbidden to enter a woman’s boudoir in a love poem, except in a dream sequence, then a permissible alternative was to animate boudoir objects with a male personality.”³¹⁸

Santangelo comments on the literature of this period, that “Scenery often becomes primarily the expression of a mood rather than a description of how objects are perceived,

³¹⁶ “A Withered Fish”, from the critical anthology *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China*, by Anne Birrell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), p. 58.

³¹⁷ Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: anomaly accounts in early medieval China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996) p. 384.

³¹⁸ Anne Birrell’s introduction to her translation of *Yutai xinyong*, *Chinese Love Poetry: New Songs from a Jade Terrace: A Medieval Anthology*, revised edition (London, New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 20.

and is so identified with an inner reality; at the same time the contrast 'natural-artificial' reflects the search for a refined and free life."³¹⁹ However, after the Sui, Santangelo notes a shift whereby, as gardens are incorporated within urban areas, the contrast between Confucian officialdom and the retreat to nature of the Daoist hermit, becomes far less stark.

Wang Guowei, in his discussion of *ci* poetry, defines categories of the personal state (*youwo zhijing* 有我之境) and the impersonal state (*wuwo zhijing* 無我之境) which also express this dichotomy: "In the personal state the poet views objects in terms of himself and so everything takes on his own colouring. In the impersonal state the poet views objects in terms of objects and so one cannot tell what is the poet himself and what is the object."³²⁰

There is an abundance of imagery of sentient Nature in Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 (1550-1617) *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭), where the mood of a scene is often constructed in terms of the flowers in the surrounding garden. This imagery seems particularly pronounced in the tenth scene, which sets the scene for the lovers' first tryst, within a dream. The female protagonist, Du Liniang 杜麗娘, wonders aloud "What if my beauty should amaze the birds and out of shame for the comparison 'cause fish to sink, wild geese to fall to earth, petals to close, the moon to hide her face' while all the flowers tremble?"³²¹ She later recalls that it was in fact her elation on seeing the myriad of flowers which led to her falling asleep and dreaming of her future husband. The lovers' first union, in the same scene, is also brought to a premature end by the intervention of the Flower Spirit, who wakes the girl by scattering petals over her.

³¹⁹ "Literary Conceptions of Nature" by Paolo Santangelo, in Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung (eds.) *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 652-653.

³²⁰ *Renjian Cihua* 人間詞話 "Talks on *Ci* in the Human World." I have used Adele Ricket's translation, entitled *Wang Kuo-wei's Jen-chien Tz'u-hua*, p. 41.

³²¹ I have used Cyril Birch's translation *The Peony Pavilion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) p. 44.

In his *Invisible dream shadows* (*You meng ying* 幽夢影) Zhang Chao 張潮 (fl. 1676 - 1700) suggests a further degree of humanisation of the natural world, by suggesting that the need for a true friend (*zhiji* 知己) is not unique to the human realm. Zhang lists seventeen different instances of what he describes as ‘true friendships’ between well-known literary figures and plants, rocks, animals, birds and musical instruments.³²² While it would be nothing remarkable to note that, for example, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) found his soulmate in chrysanthemums, in each case Zhang inverts the subject and object to insist that the reverse relationship was equally important. The non-human party is the subject who finds true friendship in the human admirer. Li Yu’s 李漁 (1611-1680) essay entitled “Looking at flowers and listening to birds”, portrays the natural world of flowers and birds as his closest friends, and the ones who know him best.³²³ Judith Zeitlin contrasts the level of anthropomorphism by this period with the limited personification in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* in which “objects are like mirrors: they have no separate identity or independent emotions; rather they allegorically represent the speaker.”³²⁴

By the early Qing, this extended personification of non-human beings appears to be readily acceptable by the readership. In the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Jia Baoyu claims that all plants experience emotions: “Not only plants and trees, but all things that live and grow have feelings. And like us, they are most responsive to those who most appreciate them.”³²⁵

The public acceptance of this is underscored by the tales about releasing captive animals which flourished in the late Ming early Qing period.³²⁶ Noting the emphasis in these tales on the sentient nature of all creatures, Handlin Smith argues persuasively that texts in this period moved away from moralising and talk of retribution, and aimed instead to appeal

³²² Zhang Chao 張潮 *You meng ying* 幽夢影 (Taipei: Wenjin cbs, 1985), p. 8. Zeitlin also has made this point (p. 74).

³²³ *Xianqing ouji* 閑情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji cbs, 2000) p. 362.

³²⁴ Zeitlin, op. cit, p. 74.

³²⁵ Cited in Paolo Santangelo, op. cit. p. 656.

³²⁶ See Yu Chün-fang *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, and J.F. Handlin Smith’s “Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 1 (Feb 1999).

to the emotions of the readers to empathise with the animals. Smith cites a tale retold by the great Buddhist Zhuhong, which portrayed the grief of a deer whose child had been killed by a hunter. When the hunter cut the mother open, he found her insides had shredded with grief, and the man gave up hunting withdrawing to the mountains to become a hermit. The point of this story, which was meant to move general readers to follow the man's example and stop harming animals, was that "animal mothers, just like human mothers, care deeply for their children."³²⁷

For Pu Songling's readership, then, sentient plants and talking animals were by no means a new phenomenon. Animal and plant spirits were a staple of *zhiguai* tradition and transmogrifications in form were commonplace in this type of literature. It has long been recognised that one of Pu Songling's greatest innovations was his use of *zhiguai* subject matter in detailed and expanded narrative. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate that, in the *Liaozhai*, there is a heightened level of personification of these natural elements, which ultimately adds to the childlikeness in the anthology.

- The natural world of the *Liaozhai*

The boundary between this or the real world and the world of the other or the unreal is bridged in the *Liaozhai* collection by the large number of stories that feature animals and even inanimate objects. These non-human elements are given personae that in various ways interact with, replace and often dominate human counterparts. Although the endowment of human characteristics on non-human and inanimate objects is a common feature of Chinese literary tradition, in the *Liaozhai* it is taken further. In Chinese, an object is inanimate if it is literally without emotions (*wuqing* 無情). In the *Liaozhai*, animals, plants, and rocks are given not only sentimentality (*qing* 情) but also a wide range of physical and moral faculties including a sense of justice, wit, physical form and sexual desire. Indeed, Karl S.Y. Kao has suggested that "Projections of human world qualities to the non-human world -- often accompanied by a blending of contradictory

³²⁷ See Handlin Smith, op.cit., p. 70.

properties -- seem to be the propensity of the mode of transformation in *Liaozhai* fantasy in general.”³²⁸

As discussed above, the displacement of emotions onto external phenomena (*yiqing*) is a well established feature of Chinese literary tradition. However, Pu Songling takes *yiqing* further, by making the object of the transferral of emotion not simply the natural world, but also the supernatural world. The childlike refusal or inability to distinguish between the boundaries of animate and inanimate is extended to include the boundaries of natural and supernatural.

- Pu Songling's view of the cosmos

Before examining individual examples of *Liaozhai*'s non-human characters, it is necessary first to step back a little to consider Pu Songling's portrayal of the relationship between man and Nature, in the sense of the whole natural system which surrounds us (*tian*). The boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are also crossed so easily it is as if they were non-existent.

The Chinese philosophical debate on the nature of the world around us is a vast area. Paolo Santangelo summarises two main opposing doctrines running through much of Chinese thinking on the relationship between people and environment: “the unitary view (*Tianren heyi* 天人合一 or *Tianren ganying* 天人感應), which envisages continuous interaction and reciprocity between Heaven and humanity; and the opposite view (*Tianren zhi fen* 天人之分) which sees a clear division between nature and humanity, between destiny and human behavior.”³²⁹ The latter view was advocated initially by Xunzi, in the chapter ‘Discourse on heaven’ (*Tian lun pian* 天論篇): “He who is clear about the separation between heaven and man, can be called a sage”.³³⁰ While this theory

³²⁸ “Projection,” p. 207.

³²⁹ “Literary Conceptions of Nature,” p. 621.

³³⁰ “Gu ming yu tian ren zhi fen, ze ke wei zhiren yi.” 故明於天人之分，則可謂至人矣 Wang Zhonglin (annot.) *Xunzi duben* 荀子讀本 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1978) p. 257.

was revived in the Tang dynasty by Confucianists such as Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) and Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842),³³¹ nevertheless the former view, that of cosmic unity, was by far the most influential.

Throughout the *Liaozhai*, there is a constant assumption that Nature is, or should be, working in harmony with the human world. Nature in this sense is seen as a basically just, benevolent force, often providing a contrast with the corrupt bureaucracy by which the human world is governed.

Fields belonging to the rich benevolent landowner Zhang Buliang are saved from a vicious hail-storm, when all the surrounding crops are destroyed (Zhang Buliang 張不量; 6:50). Chen Huafeng is given the remedy for a cattle plague which has struck his district, but while he tries to keep the knowledge to himself to profit personally from it, his cows continue to die, and the cure only becomes effective on his own livestock once he shares the treatment with his neighbours (Niu huang 牛黃; 5:29). When two brothers, one kind and one controlled by his shrewish wife, are left land on their mother's death, the shrew insists her husband take the fertile portion, but his brother then discovers gold in his field. He tries to share the gold with his brother, but whenever the greedy man takes it it turns into worthless rocks (Shanhu 珊瑚; 7:28). When a thief steals money which leaves a poor girl destitute, thunder and lightning intervene on three occasions to bring the criminal to justice (Renzhen 綬針; 8:60).

In 'The Flood' (Shuizai 水災; 3:27) *tian* is depicted in a fairly straightforward, didactic manner. The opening lines of the tale describe the lives of the local peasants, whose world is governed by the vicissitudes of the weather:-

"In the 21st year of the reign of the Kangxi emperor, there was a drought in Shandong, which lasted from the spring until the summer, and the ground was completely bare of crops. On the thirteenth day of the sixth month, the rain began

³³¹ See, for example, entries on these two thinkers in the *Zhonghua Ruxue Tongdian*, pp. 1028-1029.

to fall and people began to plant corn. On the eighteenth day, the rain came down in torrents, and people began to plant beans.”

However, when the omens of Nature are less auspicious, or perhaps because they involve less direct contact with human life, all but one of the peasants ignore them and the harmony between people and Nature is destroyed:-

“One day, an old man from Shimenzhuang saw two oxen fighting on the mountain, and warned the villagers that a flood was on its way. He then moved his family to a safe place, but the villagers all laughed at him. Shortly afterwards, the heavens opened, and the downpour continued all night long, and homes were submerged in several feet of water.”

The main moral of the tale, however, is provided by the exemplary filial conduct of an individual farmer, who puts the welfare of his parents before that of his sons, only to be rewarded in the end for his action, in a way which seems more suited to a Confucian morality text:-

“One farmer abandoned his two sons, and instead, with his wife, helped his aged mother to escape to higher ground. When he looked down on the village, it was already completely under water, but he didn’t give another thought to his sons. When the waters subsided and he returned home, he found that the whole village had turned to a ruined grave. But when he went into his house, he saw that one bedroom remained intact, and inside were his two sons, laughing happily, unharmed. It was said that this was a reward for the couple’s filial behaviour. This happened on the twentieth day of the sixth month.”

Finally, in case the point was lost, a short appendage to the story relates more evidence for the justice of heaven:-

“In the 24th year of the reign of the Kangxi emperor, there was an earthquake in Pingyang, which killed seventy to eighty percent of the population. The whole town was ruined, but one room remained intact, that of a certain filial son. In the

midst of such a large-scale catastrophe, when only the filial son escapes harm, who could say that the lord of Heaven is blind to what is right and wrong³³²?”

The other *Liaozhai* tale about an earthquake (Dizhen 地震; 1:51), while describing the disaster vividly, takes a more humorous angle in its commentary, choosing to dwell on the loss of all propriety which is commonly engendered by catastrophe. This is particularly intriguing since it is also a personal account of Pu Songling's own experience during the disaster. Despite a vivid description of the catastrophe, the author's strongest impression of the incident appears to be the nudity of the people he witnessed. This is borne out by his comment after the story, in which he describes a further incident in which a woman is struggling with a wolf, which is attempting to abduct her son. The wolf only leaves after the woman calls her neighbours. After she has told them her story in detail, she realises she is also completely naked, and runs off. “This is the same as the situation during the earthquake, when both men and women forgot themselves. When people panic and are at a loss, it really is laughable!”

There is a strong presumption throughout the collection that the natural world is also an omniscient force. This can be inferred in tales discussed below where certain individual creatures are endowed with an intelligence superior to that of their human counterparts. In “Bird language” (Niaoyu 鳥語; 7:02) a whole array of birds are depicted as wise commentators on and forecasters for the human world. Their ‘speech’ is interpreted by a Daoist monk: orioles warn of fire about to befall a village; sparrows give the dates of birth and death of some new-born twins; ducks discuss the amount of money a corrupt magistrate is keeping for himself; and cuckoos warn him he is about to lose his post. The final comment on this tale includes a humorous anecdote of a father and son who are both sitting the exams and have always had poor results. Seeing a cicada, they take it as a good omen, since in the local dialect cicadas are called ‘a slight improvement’ (稍遣). Their ignorance of nature makes them a laughing stock, however, when it is pointed out that the

³³² A reference to the *Jinshu*, Tianwenzhi “Ci tiangong kuikui, wu zaobai zhi zheng ye” 此天公憤憤，無皂白之徵也。 [This lord of Heaven is confused, and does not have the means to distinguish black and white.].

type of cicada they saw was an ‘all-over’ (都了) and indeed their results are so poor this time round that they are forbidden from ever sitting the exams again.

The reciprocal relationship between heaven and humanity (*tianren ganying*) is perhaps best demonstrated in the tale “Scholar Liu” (Liu Xiucan 柳秀才; 3:26). A tall scholar named Liu (“willow”) appears to the magistrate of a locust-infested district in a dream, and suggests he should entreat the locust deity who would appear the following day in the form of a woman, riding a fat donkey along the southwest road. The magistrate does as he suggests, and the woman agrees to rescue the crops, but is angry that Liu has revealed her secret, saying that he will suffer in return for this. The locusts then land on the willow trees and the leaves are destroyed. The closing comment on this tale seems to suggest that this is a manifestation of the Confucian ideal that if the ruler cares enough for his people, this will move Heaven (*shi zai guan you min suo gan* 是宰官憂民所感).

As I have demonstrated, *tian* is an overwhelmingly benevolent, omniscient force in the *Liaozhai* which works in harmony with human destiny. In the tale “Dragons fight with a spider” (Long xi zhu 龍戲蛛; 5:48), however, a thunderclap also causes the death of a magistrate who was “loved by his people and mourned by many”. The authorial comment at the end of the tale ends with the, presumably ironic, exclamation “The lord of Heaven is well confused!”

- The attractions of the natural world

While these attitudes to Nature provide a framework within which to approach the *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling’s positive depiction of individual natural phenomena can also be seen as symptomatic of a childlike approach.

Twentieth-century psychologists have noted the human exploitation of the animal world to serve psychological needs of reaffirming the positive aspects of humanity and as a facility for rejecting, or suppressing the negative.

“Our proneness to anthropomorphize animals has, of course, been generally recognized, particularly in its two most obvious, if contrary, aspects: our eagerness to endow animals with human personality, and our use of them to dissociate from our own animality. Both aspects reveal a dialectic. Under the first, we show our affection for animals through allowing them to share a human ‘life’ and our fondness for ourselves in projecting onto them the feelings we deem exclusive to us. Under the second aspect, we express our distance from animals by viewing them as the alien embodiment of all that is less truly human (our lower, carnal, more bestial selves), and our distaste for the human insofar as this is irrevocably tied to animality, hence in need of distantiation.”³³³

Pu Songling, in an essay written for instruction of his young students when he was a tutor in the Wang residence³³⁴ expounds Mencius’ doctrine of “It is only a trifle that differentiates man from the birds and beasts.”³³⁵ Pu explains that this small difference consists of self-regulation (*ziding* 自定). “When ordinary people feel cruel, they will want to harm others; when they feel greedy, they will want to steal; when they feel lust, they will want to act lasciviously. But when these thoughts first spring to mind, one should turn from them hurriedly, and let them dissipate naturally.” However, he ends this fairly orthodox explanation with a slight twist: “When a person’s ideas are fixed, evil words will not delude him; when a bird or animal’s ideas are fixed, even good words cannot persuade him.” Thus the ability of self-regulation and single-mindedness is common to both man and beast, the difference being that the upright man’s ideas are fixed on doing good, while animals are fixed on doing evil.

This would seem to be representative of the suppression of carnal desire and immorality by reference to the animal world which the psychologists have described. However, it is important to note that this essay is one of the few surviving pieces by Pu Songling written for students in his capacity as a tutor. The ideas expressed in it are therefore almost bound to conform more to orthodox morality than in his fictional writings. Animals in the *Liaozhai* are almost always portrayed positively, and are characterised according to Ma

³³³ Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1995) pp. 83-4.

³³⁴ In the preface to this essay, entitled “Important principles of humanity” 為人要則, and written around 1660, Pu explains that he’d been asked by Wang Bagai 王八垓, who was “feeling the shallowness of the world”, to write such a piece to instruct his son. PSLQJ pp. 1367-1372.

³³⁵ *Mencius*, Lilou zhangju xia, no. 19, James R. Ware’s translation.

Ruifang by their possession of miraculous powers (*qi* 奇), bravery (*yong* 勇), wisdom (*zhi* 智) or righteousness (*yi* 義).³³⁶ The animal kingdom in the *Liaozhai* is basically virtuous and as such the genuine relationships between animals contrast with the corrupt values of the human world.

Just as *tian* is seen as fundamentally benevolent, human kindness towards animals, particularly small animals, is always rewarded in the tales, and cruelty inevitably punished. Joanna Handlin Smith has described the fever among some literati in the late Ming early Qing periods for setting small animals free from captivity.³³⁷ Pu Songling wrote a poem and an essay about the plight of locusts. His essay “The locusts are coming” describes the plight of a farming family whose fields are overrun by a huge plague of locusts. Plagues such as this posed a real threat to the livelihood of rural areas, and seemed to be a fairly frequent occurrence. Pu’s account, while showing sympathy for the family’s troubles, ends with an appeal to the insects “Locusts, locusts, don’t fly east, your being cheated into making a worthless journey is too much for me to bear.” (蝗兮蝗兮勿東飛，誑爾空行吾不忍).³³⁸

Moreover, there are numerous instances in the tales of protagonists saving animals from from certain death, either out of love, friendship, or just kindness. In both “The Lotus Princess” (*Lianhua gongzhu* 蓮花公主; 4:22) and “The girl in green” (*Lü yi nü* 綠衣女; 4:23) the hero saves his bees, from destruction by a large snake and then a spider respectively. The eponymous female protagonist, a deer spirit, in “Hua Guzi” (*Hua Guzi* 花姑子; 4:11) rescues An Youyu 安幼輿, described as “very fond of animals” in repayment for his earlier saving of her father. The princess of the West Lake is given in marriage to a poor scholar who had once saved her and her maid, in the form of an alligator with a fish on its tail shot by his employer (*Xihu zhu* 西湖主; 4:13).

³³⁶ Ma Ruifang 馬瑞芳, *Liaozhai zhiyi chuanguozuo lun* 聊齋誌異創作論 [On creativity in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*] (Jinan: Shandong daxue cbs, 1990) pp. 131-7.

³³⁷ See Smith, op.cit., pp. 51-84.

³³⁸ PSLQJ, p. 1707.

On the other hand, those who profit from killing animals are dealt with mercilessly. The scorpion trader in “Scorpion visitor” (Xie ke 蝎客; 8:37) who pays local people to capture scorpions for him to sell is himself killed when the scorpion spirit comes looking for him. The peasant in ‘Hiding a louse’ (Cang shi 藏虱; 5:62) who finds a louse and absentmindedly wraps it in paper and stuffs it into a hole in a tree later returns, remembers the louse and opens the paper, and puts it on the palm of his hand only to find his hand develops a strange itch, then swells up painfully, eventually proving fatal. The two anecdotes under the heading of ‘Releasing Butterflies’ (Fang die 放蝶; 5:55) condemn those who joke or are frivolous at animals’ expense. The first concerns a magistrate who takes a perverse delight in having his desk covered in dead butterflies. He therefore demands that all crimes are atoned for with these insects. The tale ends when he is made the object of ridicule in front of his superior, and the butterfly policy is ended.

The second story tells of a bizarre joke which goes tragically wrong. Yu Zhongyin 于重寅 ties firecrackers to the head and tail of a donkey and sends it into the house of the local prefect, declaring it is a gift for him. The donkey rushes around madly, shooting out fireworks in all directions and setting fire to the furniture, and terrifies the prefect’s son, who is suffering from smallpox. The boy dies that night and Yu only narrowly manages to avoid harsh punishment. Finally, the authorial comment on the tale “The bird knight” (Qin xia 禽俠; 6:04) narrates how a soldier from Jinan shot a stork with an arrow. The bird flew around carrying the arrow for two years, then threw it back down near the soldier. He picked it up to scratch his ear when a door suddenly slammed shut in the wind, hitting the arrow and piercing his scalp. It killed him instantly, thus punishing him for his cruelty.

The late Ming Buddhist revival also urged a greater respect for and responsibility towards the animal kingdom. Buddhist attitudes to animals are condoned specifically in “Feeding Snakes” (Huan she 餵蛇; 4:64). A man gets lost while hawking and takes refuge in a remote Buddhist temple, only to discover that the Buddhist hermit there looks after two huge snakes, and refers to them as if they were part of his family (兒輩). The hawker is

terrified, as the snakes seem hostile towards him, and, after a sleepless night, has to rely on the Buddhist to protect him and escort him home safely.

Another Buddhist influence underlying much of the portrayal of the animal world in the *Liaozhai* is evident in the large number of tales in which reincarnation is used to dole out justice. One of the many examples of such tales is “Three lives” (Sansheng 三生; 1:26) which tells of Liu 劉, who can remember his past lives, in which because of his crimes he had been reincarnated first as a horse, then as a dog and finally as a snake, before Yama decided he had completed his atonement, and he became a human again. The same principle of hierarchy among creatures is extended to the mortal world in “Cursing the duck” (Ma ya 罵鴨; 4:26) when a man who stole a duck begins to grow feathers himself (he is cured after he confesses and is rebuked by the owner); and “A local man” (Yiren 邑人; 6:45), whereby a vicious man turns into one half of a dead pig in his local butcher’s shop and is tortured every time someone cuts meat off the carcass.

The one exception to an otherwise positive portrayal of the animal kingdom is the depiction of the wolf. The clearest instance of the lack of sympathy with this creature is the tale “Shepherd boys” (Mu shu 牧豎; 6:51). Two shepherd boys trick a wolf by each taking one of her cubs and climbing up two trees. When she returns, the boys take turns at making the cubs cry out in pain, so that she runs desperately back and forth between the trees, until she eventually dies of exhaustion. The commentator at the end of the tale seems entirely indifferent to the wolf’s fate, comparing her to those despotic officials who rant and rave to no avail. “Three comments on wolves” (Lang san ze 狼三則; 4:57) turns out to be three anecdotes in which a human butcher defeats a wolf and kills it by appealing to its greed or stupidity. The final comment once again refuses to admit any sympathy for the animal, simply stating “The cruelty of the butcher is necessary when it comes to killing wolves”. The wolf in “The barrow-pusher” (Che fu 車夫; 8:34) is described as ‘laughably shrewd’ (黠而可笑) for biting flesh off a defenceless man pushing a heavy load up a slope. Shrewdness is one of the most negative qualities in the

Liaozhai, being contrasted with the general positive ‘folly’.³³⁹ When a dissolute man rapes a wolf in the mountains, she takes revenge by killing all his children (Li shi 黎氏; 4:24).

However, Pu Songling is not entirely heartless in his depiction of this animal and one tale does allow the wolf the ability to show gratitude. The skin doctor Mao Dafu is asked by a wolf to help cure its companion. When he does, the wolf gives him gold as payment and helps protect him. The closing comment on this tale includes another anecdote in which a midwife is entreated by a wolf to help with a delivery. She agrees, and is later presented with a roe-deer as payment. The tale ends with a defensive comment: “You can see this type of incident is not unprecedented!” (毛大福; 8:39).

Several of the animal stories have David and Goliath type themes, whereby a small, insignificant animal or insect reverses the natural hierarchy by defeating a far superior creature. One example of this in the *Liaozhai* is the short tale “A mantis catches a snake” (Tanglang bu she 螳螂捕蛇; 3:58). The story is set in the human world, and is narrated through a human protagonist Zhang, who is walking in a mountain valley, hears a noise, goes to investigate, and then sees a huge snake with a mantis clinging to its head. The snake is unable to throw the mantis off, and the insect repeatedly cuts into the snake’s head with its forelegs. Eventually, the snake dies. In several Chinese proverbs, the mantis carries allusions of unjustified rashness or foolhardiness by a weak person: *tang bi dang che* 螳臂當車 (a mantis trying to stop a cart with its arms) or *tanglang bu chan, huangque zai hou* 螳螂捕蟬黃鵠在後 (a mantis catches a cicada, with an oriole just at its back). This proverb, which seems to reflect closely the title of this tale, suggests the blind recklessness caused by greed. The innovation of this story, and the reason for its ‘strangeness’ and thus inclusion in the collection, is that the reckless, weak mantis actually wins the fight and kills the snake against all probability and common sense. This tale is illustrative of the versatility of the natural hierarchy as portrayed in the *Liaozhai*.

³³⁹ I will discuss the term ‘folly’ in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Small and weak animals can defeat their superiors in the natural order. Handlin Smith, in a survey of the shift in attitudes to the animal kingdom over the Ming / Qing period has suggested that this idealisation of the smallest animals was widespread among the literati, and states that they became “metaphors for piteous and powerless human beings.”³⁴⁰

- Animism of individual *Liaozhai* creatures

Alongside this overwhelmingly positive depiction of the non-human world, animism in portrayal of individual creatures in the *Liaozhai* is taken to the extreme. Animals and even inanimate objects are depicted with a moral consciousness, sense of justice, wit, experiencing a full range of emotions, including sexual desire. In short, just as fox spirits come and go adopting and relinquishing human form as necessary, animals are indistinguishable from humans in their behaviour and mindset.

- Moral consciousness

As discussed above, there is an overriding sense of moral justice which pervades the cosmos in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*. However, the ability to use moral judgement is more remarkable when it is deployed by individual non-human protagonists in the tales. Several tales in the collection deal with such characters.

Quite a number of *Liaozhai* tales appear at first glance to be nothing more than fables, in which the purpose of inclusion of animal characters is primarily didactic. The main moral virtues which are eulogised in these tales are: filial piety, as exemplified by the tiger of Zhaocheng who repents of killing an old widow's son and becomes like a son to her (趙城虎; 3:57); loyalty to your master, as depicted in the two tales entitled “The righteous dog”, in the first of which the dog dies trying to protect his master's money and in the second he saves his master's life and then identifies the man who robbed him (義犬; 4:19 and 6:71); loyalty to your friends, exemplified by the righteous rat (義鼠; 1:50) who

³⁴⁰ Handlin Smith, op.cit. p. 74.

repeatedly risks his life to try to retrieve his friend's corpse from the snake who killed him; bravery, in "The bird knight" (Qinxia 禽俠; 6:04) when a large bird kills a snake who has been terrorising a family of storks; the importance of friendship and humility are both emphasised in "The snake man" (蛇人; 1:17) in which two snakes are depicted positively and contrasted favourably to 'people in this world'; finally, the repayment of debts of gratitude, a very common motif in traditional fiction, is portrayed by the tiger brothers in "The two Bans" (二班; 8:33) who save their former benefactor from ferocious wolves.

In this way, a whole range of Confucian virtues are eulogised in these tales, suggesting the animals' participation in the same structured system of social relationships and ethics as their human counterparts.

Another tale in which animals function in a social hierarchy along with the human protagonist is "The tiny hunting dogs" (小獵犬; 3:39). Scholar Wei is lodging in a temple while he prepares for the exams. He is having problems studying due to the swarms of insects in his room. A tiny army of hounds and eagles enters the room, kills off all the insects and present the corpses to Wei as if he were their 'emperor'. Then they disappear, leaving one hound behind to ensure the insects do not return. There's a comic twist at the end of the tale, as Wei rolls over in his sleep one night and crushes the remaining hound. However, the insects are eradicated for good. Non-humans are depicted as following human customs in the short comic anecdote about the large fish from the sea (海大魚; 9:01), when the human world is shocked at the sudden appearance of a large moving mountain. The explanation is given that it is a large fish who is leading his family to sweep graves for the Qing Ming festival.

In their quest for justice, animals may make use of their wit and intellect. The birds in the tales "The myna bird" (鵲; 2:48) and "The owl" (梟; 8:44) are both shown to be intellectually superior to their human counterparts. When his owner runs out of money and does not know what to do the myna bird, who can talk fluently, devises and carries

out a plan whereby he is sold for a high price to a rich man and then escapes and returns to his owner. In the second tale, the owl, taking the form of a man, wittily completes a verse in a drinking game, and thereby succeeds in publicly rebuking a corrupt official where his human counterparts have failed.

A whole network of idealised, traditional Confucian virtues is thus depicted, in the context of the animal kingdom. Of course, with our understanding of Pu Songling's own dissatisfaction and frustration with the society in which he lived, we can also read this as a satirical attack on the human society which surrounded him.

- Sexual love

Animism as expressed in the *Liaozhai* tales is not limited to a passive infatuation with the non-human world. Animals in the tales are frequently portrayed as active sexual partners, with the capacity for desire, passion and grief. 'Natural' animal-animal relationships are anthropomorphised in this way, as are the numerous instances of animal-human relationships, for which the *Liaozhai* is perhaps best known.

In the tale 'Geese' (Hong 鴻; 6:05) a huntsman from Tianjin catches a female wild goose. Her mate follows them home, wailing dolefully. The next morning he returns and spits out a piece of gold at the hunter's feet. The hunter realises that this is meant as a ransom for his spouse, so releases her. The word 'wife', fu 婦, is used in the words of the hunter, suggesting that this man, on seeing the male bird's grief, believes it equal to that of a human relationship. The birds fly away together. The closing comment on the story exclaims: "What do wild birds know, yet they attach such importance to sentiment! The tragedy of parting (a line from the *Songs of Chu* frequently cited to express the joy and sorrow of human the separation and re-meeting of human lovers³⁴¹) is likewise felt by animals (wu 物)."

³⁴¹ The original line reads, "Nothing in life is more tragic than parting" 悲莫悲兮於生別離.

- Animal / human relationships

One of Pu Songling's great innovations with the *Liaozhai* is his treatment of relationships between humans and non-humans. Long established as a Chinese literary trope, in the *Liaozhai* such relationships were often portrayed as healthy and more enduring than their human counterparts. Y.W. Ma has noted this innovation within traditions of supernatural fiction in China: "Considering that since the beginning of Chinese fiction in the Six Dynasties the union of a human being (usually the male) and his protean lover (usually a female animal spirit) were rarely permitted a happy ending, and that when the end came, usually in violent tragedy or in helpless despair, the one who suffered most was the female, Pu Songling's departure is dramatic indeed."³⁴²

The clearest demonstration of the total compatability of emotions in the human and non-human worlds is in the very many depictions in the stories of relationships which transcend the two. The majority of the natural images Pu uses are unconventional and are not preordained with clichéed characteristics. The most striking, and well-known, example of this is his treatment of the fox spirit, discussed below as one of the major non-human perpetrators of pro-active sexual relationships.

- the fox spirit

The fox motif has been an integral part of Chinese folklore, particularly within the *zhiguai* tradition, and as such has been analysed and endowed with very specific characteristics. The first article from the section on foxes in the early Song dynasty compilation of fiction the *Taiping Guangji*,³⁴³ is entitled "About foxes" (Shuo hu 說狐) and gives some definitive points:-

³⁴² Y.W.Ma, *ICTCL*, p.39.

³⁴³ The compilation was completed in 978, but included works spanning much of the previous millenium. Dating of individual pieces is difficult.

“The fox at fifty *sui* can transform into a woman, at one hundred can become a beauty, or a sorceress, or can become a man and have sex with women (與女人交接), has the ability to know things from over a thousand *li* away, is good at delusion, and can cause people to be deluded and lose their mind. At one thousand *sui* they can communicate with heaven (能與天通), and are known as heavenly foxes 天狐.”³⁴⁴

A salient aspect of this description, even forming some kind of defining characteristic of the various stages of a fox's life would seem to be its interaction (*jiaojie* or *tong*) with its environment, whether with mortals or, on a more elevated level, with heaven itself. Another article from the same section of the anthology goes so far as to suggest that in popular belief, the presence of a fox spirit was an essential part of a village community, since every house erected its own ancestral tablet to the deity. In support, the author cites the common proverb “Without a fox spirit, there can be no village” (wu hu mei, bu cheng cun 無狐魅，不成村).³⁴⁵

In his survey of foxes in the *Liaozhai*, the Singaporean scholar Gu Meigao 鼓美高 identifies eighty-six of the tales which involve a fox.³⁴⁶ Gu notes several features common to the foxes in the collection: their ancestry, when mentioned, is only traceable in parallel with the *zhiguai* tradition and they inevitably originally come from Shaanxi province (Gu suggests that this may be a pun on the two homonyms fox, *hu* 狐, and barbarian, *hu* 胡); the dwelling places of the fox spirits in the stories tend to reflect their animal habitats, often being remote dark places, but these can suddenly be miraculously transformed into luxurious palaces; their appearance -- although they are capable of transmogrification, it is without exception the discovery of a tail which gives them away; and the fact that most of the foxes in the collection have both surnames and given name, while some of the surnames are puns on Hu.

³⁴⁴ From the (no longer extant) *Xuan zhong ji* 玄中記, cited in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 juan 447, p.830.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, juan 447, p. 841 “The fox deity” (hushen 狐神).

³⁴⁶ “Tan ‘hu’ -- *Liaozhai zhiyi zhaji*” 談“狐” -- 聊齋誌異札記 [About the fox -- jottings on the *Liaozhai zhiyi*] in *Guoji Liaozhai lunwen ji* pp. 251-264. See pp. 252-3 for a full listing of these stories.

Gu has found four categories of fox in the collection: the parasitical fox (采補狐) commonly taking the form of a beautiful woman, who seduces men not to satisfy sexual desire, but rather to gain their *yang* essence, to complement her own surplus of *yin*; the non-parasitical fox (非采補狐) who is able to gain immortality through Daoist practice, who does not harm humans and is used as a vehicle to explore Pu Songling's idealisation of sexual love; the intelligent fox (智慧狐), which generally takes the form of a wise teacher, often tutoring an unsuccessful student to pass the exams; and the haunting fox (祟狐) which sets out to trouble humans, even kill them. Gu suggests that precedents for all four of these categories can be found in early *zhiguai* collections such as the *Soushen ji* 搜神記, or those within the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 and *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, but that Pu Songling's innovations lie in his more detailed characterisation, and with his expansion of arenas of seduction by the fox to include, for example, homosexual seduction.

Foxes in the *Liaozhai* tend to make a single type of formal transmogrification, and generally retain the same familial and social networks as humans as they had when they were foxes.³⁴⁷ This is in sharp contrast to other mythological transmogrification, notably Monkey's seventy-two transformations in the *Journey to the West* whereby the immortal could change at will into all sorts of different characters and objects apparently unrelated to his original situation.

It is interesting to note that while alcoholic stupors, sleep and Daoist magic can be transitional states for humans, for fox spirits it is precisely these conditions which are likely to return them to their original bestial form. This is also often when they are discovered as non-human imposters. In "Drinking Companion", discussed above, the human protagonist discovers his drinking partner is a fox when he is asleep beside him but does not mind and they go on to become firm friends. In "Wu Xiaolian" (武孝廉 ;

³⁴⁷ Gu notes a single exception to this rule: the fox in the tale "Liu Haishi" (劉海石; 3:01), who transforms first into a human, but then, once discovered, takes on the new guise of a pig, in order to try to escape. However, this second transformation follows its semi-subjugation by Haishi, when it is unable to retake human form.

4:12), however, Shi discovers his lover is a fox when she reverts to her original form when drunk, and their relationship ends.

Rania Huntington suggests that “In the Qing, only wicked vixens would have sex with men for their own benefit; good foxes did it for love, or to repay a moral debt, without benefit to themselves.”³⁴⁸ This represents a significant departure from earlier depictions, and is further evidence of the greater degree of flexibility in the personification of animals in later literature. One of Pu Songling’s innovations in describing tales of fox spirits is the possibility of a happy conclusion to the plot. The fox is no longer a dangerous threat in a beautiful disguise, and in fact is potentially morally superior to the human, with feelings, desires, and the ability to feel hurt and rejected.

- Other spirits

Depiction of animals in the *Liaozhai* with qualities indistinguishable from their human counterparts does not apply purely to foxes. A Ying (阿英; 5:23) suggests marriage to the protagonist Gan Jue, saying that they were previously betrothed. When Gan discovers she is a parrot spirit, however he is uneasy and she flies away. She is morally superior throughout, however, returning to save his family from an attack by bandits and retaining a warm relationship with Gan’s sister. She refuses to resume sleeping with Gan, stating that this would offend Heaven. Finally, Gan rapes her, and she leaves for good, saying she hates him.

One of the most shocking tales in the collection³⁴⁹ is “Adultery with a dog” (Quan.jian 犬奸; 1:19). The wife of a trader from Qingzhou is frustrated when he leaves her for long periods at a time, and so begins having intercourse with the family dog. Her secret is out

³⁴⁸ Rania Huntington, “Foxes and sex in late imperial Chinese narrative” in *Nan nü* 2.1 (Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp.78-128), p. 88.

³⁴⁹ The editor of at least one widely available modern Chinese translation of the collection evidently considers this the most improper of the tales, and has therefore decided to leave it in the original classical language, presumably thereby restricting readership. It is the only tale treated in this way in the collection. (*Baihua Liaozhai* 白話聊齋; Changsha; Yuelu shushe, 1990).

when one day the husband returns, lies down with his wife, and incenses the dog, who rushes in and mauls him to death. The neighbours hear of this and the case is brought before the magistrate. The woman initially denies the charges, but the dog is then brought in and it rushes over and tears off her clothes. Guilty as charged, they are led away by two guards to be executed by dismemberment. In typical *Liaozhai* style, the end of the story has an added twist as the guards take bribes en route to the execution ground from would-be onlookers, and make the pair ‘perform’ in front of the audience. The dog is not transformed physically in this tale, but is still endowed with not only sexual desire, but also accompanying human characteristics of jealousy and anger.

Female bestiality is also the subject of “The woman from Qingcheng” (Qingcheng fu 青城婦; 8:43). Once again the woman is the wife of a businessman who has left her alone for a long time, perhaps a reflection of a common male anxiety at the time. When he returns and sleeps with her, he dies immediately. After compelling evidence from a witch doctor, it is proved in court that she is the daughter of a woman who had sex with a snake and that therefore a snake’s tongue would protrude from her vagina whenever she was aroused, killing her partner. The case against her is resolved.

In the story ‘Su the Immortal’ (Su xian 蘇仙; 2:27) the female protagonist becomes attracted to some reeds in the water. She manages to impregnate herself by simply coming close to them and admiring them. The son she gives birth to is semi-immortal, and is a paragon of filial piety. The physical boundary between human and non-human is crossed in “Giving birth to a dragon” (Chan long 產龍; 3:22). Mrs. Li’s husband dies while she is pregnant, and her belly later begins to expand and contract rapidly. One day, the head of a dragon emerges, but recoils inside immediately. They enlist the help of a Buddhist sorceress to dispel the dragon, and Li finally gives birth to a semi-dragon child, with transparent flesh, whose inner organs are all visible. These two anecdotes seem to represent the ultimate crossing of boundaries since, if procreation can occur between human and supernatural beings, then surely anything is possible.

The relationship between human and non-human is not limited to the animal kingdom. The story of “The Ethereal Rock” (石清虛; 8:30) has been discussed extensively in Zeitlin’s study of obsessive love so I will not repeat that here.³⁵⁰ The story narrates the infatuation of a fanatical rock collector, Xing Yunfei 邢雲非, with a rock he finds. Zeitlin traces how the rock has an active role in the relationship, even smashing itself into smithereens to demonstrate its loyalty to Xing.

Plants are also capable of proactive love, and flower spirits are described just as vividly as their animal counterparts. One of the best examples of this is the tale of Gejin (葛巾; Vol. 10, no. 26) a peony spirit whom the protagonist, Chang Dayong 常大用, an obsessive peony collector, meets and falls in love with. Gejin is depicted as a strong-willed, financially competent female who feels love, sexual desire and has a strong sense of self-respect: she makes the first move in the relationship, to signify her interest in Chang, she helps support him financially, and becomes indignant when Chang questions her about her identity, leaving angrily. The vivid characterisation of Gejin’s emotional states facilitates readers’ empathy with the flower, when she seems to be discriminated against merely because of her original form. The historian of the strange at the end of the tale compares Chang’s cynicism to the poet Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772-846) willingness to take a rose in place of a wife to relieve his loneliness, and comments ruefully: “The singleminded nature of love even extends to ghosts and spirits; and these flowers cannot be said to be without emotion [the phrase used here is *wuqing* 無情, which is a pun on “inanimate”]. When the magistrate [a reference to Bai Juyi] was feeling lonely, he took a flower as his wife; since a flower can even become a man’s soulmate, there’s no need to try so hard to analyse its background. What a shame Scholar Chang didn’t manage to do this!”

An illuminating study of the reciprocal relationship between a young girl and a tree is portrayed in ‘The Orange Tree’ (Jushu 橘樹; 5:24). A Daoist priest gives Magistrate Liu 劉 a potted orange tree as a gift for his daughter’s sixth birthday. The girl loves it, but just

³⁵⁰ Zeitlin, *Historian*, pp. 74-88. She also translates this tale in full, as an appendix, pp. 204-7.

as Liu is due to move on to a new post, it bears fruit. Lin Zhifeng 林植峰 has commented that this young female protagonist's belief that the tree she had grown so attached to was a living friend "is completely in accordance with the childish natural quality of loving beauty".³⁵¹

Liu pretends to his daughter that they are just going away for a short time, and cannot bring the tree as it is too heavy. However, before they leave she asks the servants to plant it next to the staircase. Years later, she marries the man appointed to succeed her father. When they return, they discover the tree is now huge and bears a thousand oranges. The servants tell her that while she was gone it had continually grown, but never borne any fruit. The tree bears a lot of fruit for the next three years, but withers in the fourth year. The woman tells her husband his official days are numbered, and sure enough he is dismissed that autumn.

The tree's grief is manifested by the fact that it did not bear any fruit while the girl was away. It also possesses qualities of divination, and 'cares' enough to reveal its knowledge. Similar to many of the animistic tales in the *Liaozhai*, the authorial comment to this tale ends with an exclamation "If trees do this, how much more do people!" In many ways, this comment is crucial to the portrayal of the natural world in the *Liaozhai*, where the ideal world is depicted in terms of animals, plants, or the supernatural. The detail with which they are portrayed extends the personification but then, as Lu Xun commented "just as we forget that they are not human, the author introduces some strange happening to remind us that they are supernatural after all."³⁵² This combination of first establishing a deliberately heightened personification of a non-human subject, and then casually informing or reminding the reader of the subject's true nature, serves to erode further any boundary between the human and non-human spheres.

³⁵¹ *Pu Songling Yanjiu* Issue 2, 1989 p 100.

³⁵² Lu Xun, p. 236.

- Conclusion

To analyse the implications of a childlike mind, it is useful to look first at the fundamentals of what I have termed proto-consciousness. Following modern psychoanalysis, the infant's conception of the world is characterised by a basic lack of distinctions and differentiations. Initially, this is reflected in the non-differentiation between the self and the outside world. I have attempted to draw parallels between this and Wang Yangming doctrines which privilege the psyche over external reality. The perceived subjective world which Wang describes seems very similar to the infant's world view as we understand it. In the *Liaozhai* tales such ideas are reflected in the blurring of boundaries between illusion and reality, for which they are so well-known. The protagonist in many of these tales crosses this boundary, usually facilitated by a dream, or a state of comatosis, an alcoholic stupor, or by performed magic. Generally, he is the agent who creates the illusion, participates in it, and is changed by it. His original 'real' world is ultimately modified in some way by the experience. The world as he sees it is therefore entirely subjective and is centred around his own mental and sensory faculty. Illusion becomes reality and reality becomes illusion, but neither exists independently of the protagonist.

A further non-differentiation in the child's conception of the world is that between human and non-human form. For the child in the animistic stage of development, both human and non-human creatures are characterised by the same essential life-force, and this enables children to have two-way relationships with their dolls, toys and surroundings. Anything which a child can observe in a human can be projected onto a non-human, whether or not the child is even mature enough to distinguish the two. Projection of sentiment (*yiqing*) has a long tradition in Chinese scholarship. In literary terms, the personification of non-human beings in fiction can act as a manifestation of this concept. In the *Liaozhai*, this personification is particularly extensive, and non-humans are endowed with a whole range of moral virtues, faculties and emotions. This is most

evident in the very large number of tales which involve sexual relationships across the non/human divide.

These ideas form the backdrop to a very wide range of *Liaozhai* tales and create a contextual framework for the collection, in which the distinctions and boundaries I have discussed above are irrelevant and through which an inherently childlike consciousness pervades the collection.

Chapter 5 ~ Naiveté

A further degree of childlikeness is evident on the level of characterisation within individual tales. A significant number of protagonists in the *Liaozhai* stories are extremely naive or immature, both in their ideas and in their behaviour. In some cases, Pu Songling condones this naiveté outright, and explicitly suggests that such characters possess a higher level of 'genuineness' and idealism than their counterparts in the tales. In other cases, Pu indirectly contrasts it with those qualities required to succeed in worldly affairs, and the heroes are thus depicted as deficient in some way. Sometimes, during the course of these narratives, the protagonist 'grows up' and gains a more mature, or socially aware personality. In what follows, I shall explore the various manifestations of this naiveté in character portrayal as a further example of the childlikeness of the collection.

The English term 'naiveté' derives from French and Latin roots implying naturalness or innateness, and is defined as: "unaffected, unconsciously artless" or "foolishly credulous, simple"; in reference to art as "straightforward in style, eschewing subtlety or conventional technique"; in the sphere of the medical sciences as "not having had a particular experience before" or "lacking the knowledge to guess the purpose of an experiment." In philosophy, naive realism is "the belief that an object of perception is not only real but has in reality all its perceived attributes."³⁵³

Defined in this way, naiveté seems to be the essence of the childlike mind which Li Zhi advocated. A surprisingly large number of *Liaozhai* stories feature overtly naive protagonists who, while physically adult, exhibit childlike attitudes and behaviour. Some are naive in their attitudes to money, and some in their studies, while others are sexually naive or immature. In what follows, I will first look briefly at those stories which primarily depict a child protagonist, and then go on to examine the depiction of adult, usually male, protagonists who are essentially naive and childlike in their worldview.

³⁵³ All these definitions have been taken from the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 1879-80.

- Child protagonists in the *Liaozhai*

A number of tales deal simply with child protagonists, who are depicted vividly and are often shown able to overcome obstacles that defeat adults. This is one reason for the popularity of the collection among child readers and for the frequent classification of some *Liaozhai* stories within the semi-canonical category of “children’s literature” (*ertong wenxue* 兒童文學). Examples of such tales include “Shepherd boys” (牧豎; 6:51), “The Orange Tree” (橘樹; 5:24) and “Crickets” (促織; 3:25), which were discussed in the previous chapter. There are also a number of tales which open with the description of a child, but in which the main action of the plot is centred around the adult he later grows into. I shall not deal with those here.

A study on this subject by Lin Zhifeng 林植峰 notes that the real value of Pu’s portrayal of individual children lies not only in his use of them as a metaphor for his idealistic view of the world, but also in the accurate depiction of their ways of thinking and behaviour. Lin goes so far to suggest that, in terms of the artistic value and accuracy of his portrayal of children, Pu Songling is unrivalled amongst writers of Chinese classical fiction.³⁵⁴ What is particularly appealing about these tales for the child reader, however, is the depiction of the fulfilment of childish fantasy and the removal of restrictions on the child’s ability.

In “The trader’s son” (賈兒; 1:41) the ten year old protagonist is forced to become the man of the house, to protect his mother’s honour when she is repeatedly seduced by a fox spirit while her husband is away on business. Seriously afflicted, her husband is at a loss, and Daoist charms prove ineffectual. Her son, however, persistently tries to fight off the fox spirit, and eventually devises a shrewd plan to poison it and so saves his mother from

³⁵⁴ Lin Zhifeng, “Tan *Liaozhai zhiyi* zhong guanyu ertong xinli tezheng de miaoxie” 談聊齋誌異中關於兒童心理特征的描寫 [On the portrayal of psychological characteristics of children in the *Liaozhai*] (in PSLYJ issue 2 (1989, pp. 97-109), p. 101.

this fate.³⁵⁵ The concluding sentence to this tale states that the boy later became a regional commander. Defending a woman's chastity in this way is a quintessentially macho and adult activity, but here a young boy takes on the role. The fact that the woman he is defending is his own mother further highlights the role reversal, since it inverts both age and the parent-child relationship.

The fluidity of boundaries between child and adult is taken one step further in the tale "The girl from Zhending" (眞定女; 1:29), where the limitations of the child's physical body is questioned. An orphan, the girl is being brought up by the family of her future husband. When she is six or seven years of age, her betrothed has sex with her, and she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy. The story ends with the girl's mother-in-law's exclamation "Who'd have thought that a fist-sized mother could give birth to an awl-sized son!" No rational explanation is attempted for the incident, and the tale is left hanging on this statement of incredulity. While it is conceivable that children may be emotionally, or intellectually, as mature as adults, procreation is the absolute property of the adult world, a physically impossible feat for a child to perform. In this tale, even this ultimate boundary is blatantly disregarded.

The clearest portrayal of subversion of age roles occurs in the tale "Danan" (大男; 8:26). The eight year old prodigy Danan, whose name literally means 'big boy', prays at the temple that he could become sixteen within the year, so that he can go and look for his father who left before his birth. Lin Zhifeng has noted that this is a very realistic depiction of a child's idealistic hopes: "Children dream of growing up quickly, but they lack understanding of objective rules, and in their minds imagination and reality become confused."³⁵⁶ In this tale, however, Danan's idealism is rewarded and he does seem to grow physically at superhuman speed. He then leaves home when he is still very young, and goes through a kind of rite of passage during which he gets lost and is robbed twice

³⁵⁵ There is some discrepancy about the ending of this story: in the 24 volume edition she recovers, while in the *Zhuxuezhai* edition she dies. In both cases, however, the fox is destroyed first and the variation in the mother's fate is more a judgement on her lack of chastity, rather than on the son's ability.

³⁵⁶ Lin Zhifeng, PSLYJ, issue 2, pp. 105 ff.

before being taken in by a kindly businessman. He later becomes a capable magistrate, and is contrasted with his impotent and incompetent father Xi Chenglie 奚成列, whom he eventually saves and ends up supporting financially.

- Childish behaviour by adult *Liaozhai* protagonists

The adult characteristics with which the *Liaozhai* child protagonists are endowed are invariably positive qualities, whether physical strength or wisdom, and this is in keeping with conventions of children's literature. The transgression of boundaries between childhood and adulthood are standard in works of this type. What is striking in the collection is the number of stories in which these boundaries are crossed in the opposite way: in which the adult protagonists display childlike characteristics.

In what follows, I will look at manifestations of naiveté and immaturity in such adult protagonists, with regard to sex, money and studying.

- the naive male

In most instances, the characterisation of the naive male is effected by an inversion of traditional gender roles, and by contrast with a strong, experienced and worldly wise female. Inversion of traditional gender stereotypes in writing of this period was common and has been the subject of much recent research.³⁵⁷ The relative weakness of many of the male characters in the *Liaozhai* in comparison with their female counterparts has also been discussed in some recent studies, but these have tended to concentrate on the nature of the female characters, particularly focusing on those tales whose plots feature controlling licentious mortals, notably the 'shrew' (*pofu* 潑婦).³⁵⁸ Such a woman uses

³⁵⁷ Examples include K McMahon's *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists*, C. Furth's study of late Ming medical writings, entitled "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century China," (*Late Imperial China*, Dec. 1988, Vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 1-31) and Maram Epstein's PhD dissertation, "Beauty is the Beast." (Princeton University, 1992)

³⁵⁸ See, for example, Yenna Wu (1995) and Zeitlin pp. 127-131. Zeitlin also points out that it was the notoriety of this theme in the *Liaozhai* which led Hu Shi to suggest that Pu was also the author of the novel

boisterous behaviour and physical violence to assert her control in the bedroom, and extend this control to other spheres of daily life. However, these tales, which inevitably end in the shrewish woman being subdued, are basically didactic in nature. One of the best known examples of this character is the eponymous Jiang Cheng (江城; 5:10), whose inhumane treatment of her husband and his family is described vividly. While the attraction of the story for the reader is the detailed, occasionally comic, description of her sadistic behaviour, the plot is ultimately resolved in a fairly conventional manner, by Jiang Cheng's contrite repentance, subsequent conversion to Buddhism, and transformation into the role of a submissive wife. The theme of the strange in shrew tales such as these centres on detail of characterisation, rather than the outcome of the plot, which is nothing extraordinary.

Pu Songling's concern about such women is evident from the recurrence of this theme in several of his other writings, including "An Explication of the *Classic of Hen-pecked Husbands*" (Pa po jing shu 怕婆經疏), in which Pu bemoans the insurmountable problems of jealousy and shrewishness among wives,³⁵⁹ and the colloquial play *An Incantation against Jealousy* (Rang du zhou 讓妒咒), which is based on "Jiang Cheng," and which opens with the suggestion that there is a shrew in every house, and the rhetorical question "who in the world is not afraid of his wife?"³⁶⁰ There is some debate among contemporary Chinese scholars about whether Pu's fascination with this character type is due to his personal situation, since there is some suggestion that a close relative may have been afflicted in this way.³⁶¹

Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World (Xingshi yinyuan zhuan 醒世姻緣傳), a conclusion since discredited. For more on this topic see Xu Fuling 徐復嶺. *Xingshi yin yuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kao lun* 醒世姻緣傳作者和語言考論 [A study of authorship and language in *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World*] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1993)

³⁵⁹ PSLQJ, p. 1394; LZWJ p. 388 *The Classic of Hen-pecked Husbands* is, sadly, no longer extant.

³⁶⁰ PSLQJ, pp. 2765-2889; LZLQJ pp. 325-449.

³⁶¹ The wife of Pu's eldest brother appears to have been quite a ferocious woman. (see eg. Ma Ruifang, 1986, pp. 40-41). Another example is Pu's good friend, Wang Luchan, who was also notoriously hen-pecked (see Chang and Chang, 1998, pp. 106-7). In any case, the trope was common in fiction of this period.

Nevertheless, I feel that this aspect of Pu's writings has been somewhat overemphasised in these studies. In only around a fifth of the five hundred or so *Liaozhai* tales can the female character be described as more than incidental to the plot. Of these, only a small minority depict a shrew, and in most of these the shrew merely provides a backdrop to the plot development. In any case, this portrayal of sexually controlling females in the shrew stories is undoubtedly negative. The controlling female stereotype is always subdued, whether by supernatural intervention or sudden enlightenment, and the story ends with her serving her husband as a docile obedient partner. Thus I suggest that the primary purpose of these didactic stories is to reflect upon the nature of the male, and to provide reassurance to a nervous male readership that such women are not invincible.

In addition to the negative shrew stereotype in the portrayal of some female characters in the *Liaozhai*, we also find positive depiction of a sexually proactive, experienced women. In the tales I am concerned with here, fox spirits who take control are shown not only to be virtuous, but also to be indispensable in educating the male protagonist. In some stories this control is exercised at the level of household management, but in others, perhaps more surprisingly, in the sexual sphere. This tendency is particularly evident in those stories where the female's role is as sex tutor to the naive male.

- Sexual naiveté

Sexual immaturity in the *Liaozhai* takes two forms: ignorance and impotence. The former is generally exhibited by a naive male protagonist who is ignorant of the mechanics of sex. During the course of the tale, the protagonist is sexually enlightened and/or cured of his impotency, although the ending is not necessarily a happy one.

Female superiority in the 'arts of the bedchamber' is a recurring theme in Chinese official discourse on sexual matters, exemplified in the content of many of the medical handbooks. In what follows, I will consider Pu Songling's depiction of sexually superior females and inferior males, specifically in his treatment of the female sex tutors or

doctors and their naive male counterparts, in relation to this traditional Chinese discourse on sex education.

The danger posed by the sexual woman is a common theme in traditional Chinese fiction. Fuelled, no doubt, by the stories of concubines bringing down dynasties and the like, the femme fatale, whether represented as a supernatural being or a mortal, is a literary cliché in China as much as in the west. The specifically sexual threat she poses is expressed in the first chapter of the late Ming dynasty novel *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅):-

“A sweet girl of eighteen years,
Her breasts are soft and white --
But below her waist she carries a sword
That will behead all foolish men.
Although one does not see
Their severed heads roll
Imperceptibly she will drain your bones
Of the last drop of marrow.”³⁶²

Dangerous as the sexual female is perceived to be, the ultimate paradox of Confucian gender discourse is the requirement to produce offspring. This ensures the paramount importance of sexual relations within official discourse. The long tradition in China of the compilation of sex handbooks, fundamentally for medical consultation, ascribes a degree of power exclusively to the female, on medical grounds. The female sex drive is invariably presented as problematic, and not easily understandable for the male.

Several of these handbooks concern the three female sex tutors of the Yellow Emperor, the plain girl (*sunü* 素女) the dark girl (*xuannü* 玄女) and the elected girl (*cainü* 采女), who taught him the joys of sex. In a Japanese anthology of pre-Tang Chinese sexual works, the *I-shin-po* (*Yi xin fang* 醫心方), compiled by Tamba Yasuyori (cc. 982-4), a

³⁶² This poem, 二八佳人體似酥，腰間仗劍斬愚夫。雖然不見人頭落，暗里教君骨髓枯， is included on the first page of the opening chapter in the so-called ‘B edition’ of this novel, which is thought to have originated in the Chongzhen period (1628-44). For a summary of the differences between the three editions (A, B and C), see David Roy’s introduction to *The Plum in the Golden Vase, or Chin P’ing Mei, Vol. 1: the Gathering* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. xx-xxi. I have used Van Gulik’s translation, op.cit. p. 288.

transcript of some of these lessons is given.³⁶³ The Plain Girl states directly, “All debility of man must be attributed to faulty exercise of the sexual act. Woman is superior to man in the same respect as water is superior to fire.”³⁶⁴ These texts dictate that the ideal for a man wishing to prolong his life is to copulate frequently with different women, but not to emit semen. In each of his sexual encounters, however, female satisfaction is paramount. The privileging of female sexual satisfaction was a prerequisite not only for long life, but also for ensuring descendants. “In order to obtain children a man must store up and nurture his semen and not ejaculate too frequently. If then he emits semen when copulating with the woman on the third or fifth day after her menstruation has stopped, conception will result.”³⁶⁵ In this way, then, these legendary tutors gave sexual instruction which would ensure female sexual satisfaction, and reinforced this both by presenting the allure of longevity, and by invoking the most compelling Confucian doctrine, that of producing offspring.

In the *Liaozhai* tales, the secret of such sexual prowess is given primarily to the female fox spirit. An example of the practical nature of advice such a sex tutor could give occurs in the *Liaozhai* tale ‘Hengniang’ (恆娘; 7:32). The heroine, Zhu, is initially portrayed as a stereotypical jealous wife, whose husband inexplicably prefers to have sex with his less attractive concubine. At her wits end, Zhu appears to be following the shrew plot of jealousy-induced concubine-battering for which Pu Songling has become well-known. However, before she resorts to such aggression, Zhu becomes friends with Hengniang, whom she later discovers to be a fox spirit, and pours out her woes to her. Hengniang then proceeds to give Zhu systematic lessons in the art of flirting. Over a sustained period of time, Zhu is taught to stop pestering her husband for sex, and instead to try playing hard to get; to dress shabbily for a period and suddenly stun him with her beauty. This,

³⁶³ It was from these that Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864-1927) reconstructed the well-known Chinese handbooks, the *Sunü jing* 素女經 [The classic of the plain girl], the *Sunü fang* 素女方 [Recipes of the Plain Girl], the *Yufang mijue* 玉房秘訣 [Secret prescriptions for the bedchamber] and the *Yufang zhiyao* 玉房指要 [Essentials of the bedchamber], in 1914. I have followed the translations, where given, in R.H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1974).

³⁶⁴ Van Gulik, op.cit., p 135.

³⁶⁵ This passage from the *Yufang mijue* is cited in Van Gulik, op.cit., p 149.

predictably, works like a charm and Hengniang then continues the lessons, explaining how to flirt with him, and, ultimately, how to keep him. By the end of the story, Zhu is in complete control of her husband's sex life. The unofficial historian, while lamenting the trait of human nature which perversely prefers what is hidden to that which is easily available, suggests that the fact that women are able systematically to exploit this human failing is a result of a 'secret knowledge' which has been passed down through the generations.

Of course, the very fact that this story takes place within a male-dominated household, where the husband is allowed the freedom to choose between two sexual partners, while the wife is ultimately subjected to his free-will, is indicative of the limitations of this power. As in the majority of the *Liaozhai* tales, Zhu is allowed a certain degree of sexual autonomy in this story, only so long as she remains within the general male-dominated structures of Confucian society. However, the development in fiction of this character of the female sex tutor simultaneously consolidates the character of the naive male student.

In a literary text, the use of this motif of the omniscient sex tutor instructing an ignorant and innocent student engenders a situation very familiar to many readers in late imperial China, for whom the classroom provided a perpetual backdrop for much of their life. The secrets of the sensual sphere became substitutes for the classical learning formally required of them. While the latter could lead to success in their future career, the former could lead to another kind of personal fulfilment. Moreover, the female fox spirit is substituted for the invariably male academic tutor, and the whole process of gaining sexual experience is thus portrayed in a way which mirrors the pattern of daily life of a seventeenth century scholar.

After the naive male has been educated about sex, he is not necessarily enamoured with it. Yue Zhong (樂仲; 8:21) is another naive protagonist, ignorant of the facts of life. Before he was born, his father died. When his mother, a devout Buddhist, becomes ill and craves meat, the boy cuts off some of his own flesh from his leg for her to eat. This is a

common cliché in Chinese tradition, but Pu Songling twists the ending: she recovers slightly, but is so upset to discover she has broken her vow of abstinence, she starves herself to death. Her guilt feelings about eating meat appear to outweigh any concern for her son's sacrifice. Yue Zhong, who himself eats meat and drinks alcohol freely, marries late, but is still a virgin, and is horrified on his wedding night, exclaiming: "What men and women do when they sleep together really is the filthiest thing in the world; I certainly don't derive any pleasure from it!" He then divorces his wife and lives alone. He is naively generous and is often taken advantage of by local gamblers and tricksters, and his household is always poor. In the end, however, the Historian praises his sincerity over others' superficial abstinence, saying this is true Buddhist devotion.

The tale "Qing'e" (青娥; 5:27) concerns the relationship between Huo Huan and the eponymous heroine. Yang Rui has made a psychoanalytical study of this tale and suggests that the plot is reminiscent of the outworkings of an oedipal fantasy.³⁶⁶ Huo's father had died when the boy was very young, and his mother had doted on him. He was a very clever child, but ignorant about sexual love. As an adolescent, he becomes infatuated with Qing'e and uses a trowel given him by a Daoist to dig through the walls in her house, reaching her bedroom, and then simply falling asleep next to her. At this point Yang suggests he is "comparable to a baby". His desire for Qing'e is a compelling force within him, but is entirely divorced at this stage from any real desire for sex. He simply wishes to be close to her. His actual age is deliberately left vague. When he is discovered lying next to her, he is described as an adolescent scholar (*zongjiao shusheng* 總角書生), but his reaction when confronted angrily by her family, is to burst into tears and declare: "I'm not a burglar -- it was really simply because I was in love with Qing'e and wanted to be close to her sweet fragrance." This leads them to treat him leniently, as a mere child (*tongzi* 童子).

³⁶⁶ See her "Oedipal Fantasy in Disguise: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*" in *Tamkang Review* 1994 (winter) Vol. XXV; Part 2, pp. 67-93. Yang Rui has adopted a psychoanalytical approach in a number of innovative articles on the *Liaozhai*. Here, she analyses three tales, "Qing'E", "Changting" and "Hua bi".

Another area of sexual immaturity dealt with in these tales is physical, that of sexual impotence, often taking the form of an inadequate male member. This theme is common among literature of the early Qing, particularly in such works as Li Yu's 李漁 (1611 - 1680) *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (Rou pu tuan 肉蒲團). In this novel, penis enlargement is a major factor in the plot development. Throughout the novel, it seems to be assumed that female pleasure and satisfaction is in proportion to the size of the male penis. As discussed above, female satisfaction was considered essential for a successful sexual encounter, and thus a small penis was seen as a serious handicap in late imperial China.

The tale "Qiaoniang" (巧娘; 2:11) is perhaps the ultimate reversal of traditional sexual roles. The protagonist, Lian, is described in the opening lines of the tale as being sexually impotent, due to his particularly small penis. His misfortune is further compounded by the fact that this is common knowledge throughout the village, so no woman is willing to marry him. Away from his hometown, he meets the fox spirit Qiaoniang, who attempts to seduce him, but is horrified when she discovers his deficiency. Later, another female fox spirit, to repay a debt of gratitude, brews some medicine to cure him, and he lives out his life in a happy threesome with her daughter and Qiaoniang. The happy ending is condoned by his parents, who then make him show off his sexual prowess, by having intercourse with one of their servants. In this way, a deficiency which had previously made him the laughing stock of the village is cured by female intervention.

The theme of male deficiency cured by the proactive female sex-tutor, is again portrayed in "Xiao Cui" (小翠; 5:46). Here, the root cause of the protagonist's impotency appears to be mental rather than physical. His naive stupidity is summed up by his inability to distinguish men from women. Xiao Cui, whose reason for marrying is the fulfilment of a previous obligation, initially conforms to the stereotype of the playful fox spirit, who exploits her husband's mental disability by dressing him in different costumes and playing pranks around the house. However, once the debt has been fulfilled, she also cures her husband's impotence. She appears to suffocate him in the bath, and when he

revives his simple-mindedness is cured. She then ensures him a sexually fulfilled future by finding him a new wife who is able to bear him children, before leaving him.

In this way, Xiao Cui transforms her husband from a social outcast to a family man and active participant in society. Xiao Cui's own misfortune is that, unlike the spirit in "Qiaoniang" whose medical skills are easily evaluated, her contribution is never recognised by her husband's family, who merely tire of her continual pranks and are relieved when she leaves. Sexual impotence and naive stupidity go hand in hand in this tale.

In the above stories, the arts of the bedchamber are the property of the female, to pass on as she wishes. With her superior knowledge of this all-important subject, she is in a position of authority whereby she can control her lover. Whether this control takes the form of tutoring him in the art of making love, or in curing his physical dysfunction, she is ultimately portrayed positively, in contrast with the other type of sexually controlling construct, the aggressive shrew.

In contrast, when a cure for physical deficiency is sought within the male world, the ending is less than happy. "Medicine Monk" (Yao Seng 藥僧; 6:56) is a moral tale, a parody of a man's overreaching desire for sexual potency. An itinerant monk sells the protagonist a pill to increase his sexual potency. Delighted with the effect of the medicine as his penis increases by a third, he then becomes obsessed, steals more medicine and takes an overdose. Eventually his penis becomes the size of a third leg and he is forced to lie in the street all day, permanently disabled through his obsessive search for sexual supremacy by this means.

In this way, Pu Songling suggests the secret to curing male sexual impotency lies with the female alone, a suggestion which is closely mirrored in a Ming Dynasty sex handbook, the *Admirable Discourses of the Plain Girl* (Sunü miaolun) [preface dated 1566 AD] in which Sunü warns against the overuse of drugs for this purpose, advising that "If the

emotions of the man and the woman are in harmony and if their spirits are in communion, the size of the male member will increase of its own accord".³⁶⁷ The need to maintain a balance between *yin* and *yang* forces, therefore, invests the female with an authority which places the male entirely at her mercy.

The tale "Yingning" (嬰寧; 1:48) is one of the most well-known of the *Liaozhai* tales, and has been studied extensively. It is also the most commonly associated with depictions of naiveté. At first glance it seems to be an exception to my argument above in that in this case, the apparently naive protagonist is female, and her male partner is the more sexually expert. The personality of the eponymous heroine appears to be very attractive to readers as the epitome of childish purity and natural happiness. Her name itself, Wai-yee Li notes, "suggests an immediate association with childlike artlessness and innocence (*ying* [baby], *ning-xing-er* [a lovely child]). In the story laughter is indeed synonymous with innocence, spontaneity, daring, defiance of ritual and of authority."³⁶⁸

Wang Zifu is a child prodigy, who passes the district exam when he was fourteen. He falls passionately in love with Yingning as soon as he sees her. It takes some time for him to find her again. Her foster-mother introduces them, describing her as "already sixteen years of age, but just as foolish as an infant" (年已十六，呆痴裁如嬰兒). On meeting Wang, Yingning's immediate reaction is to giggle uncontrollably.³⁶⁹ When alone with her, Wang tells her of his love, and she persistently misunderstands. He shows her the flower he has kept, and she asks why he's kept it, when it's already dead. She then offers to get him a whole bunch of flowers, since he obviously likes them so much. Wang becomes impatient at her misunderstanding, and tells her it is her that he loves, not the flower. The exchange continues:-

³⁶⁷ Cited in Van Gulik, p.272.

³⁶⁸ See Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 108-9.

³⁶⁹ As noted in Hsu Pi-ch'ing's discussion of the connection between seventeenth century joke anthologies and the theory of the child-like mind, this condoning of laughter and folly was a trend in the late Ming and early Qing period. See Hsu's "Feng Meng-lung's Treasury of Laughs." I discuss ideas of folly in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

“‘It goes without saying that relatives should love each other.’
‘It’s not relatives I’m talking about, but love between husband and wife.’
‘What difference is there?’
‘They sleep on one pillow at night.’
Yingning turned this over in her mind, then said, ‘I’m not used to sleeping with strangers.’”

Later, when her foster-mother asks them what they were talking about to make them so late for dinner, Yingning replies:-

“‘My cousin wanted me to share his pillow.’
In great embarrassment Wang shot her a look at which she smiled and was silent. Luckily the old woman had not heard and repeated her question. Wang made an evasive answer, then whispered a reproach to the girl, who asked, ‘Did I say something wrong?’
‘That’s a secret between us!’
‘It may be a secret from others, but surely not from my mother. Everybody has to sleep; what harm is there in that?’”³⁷⁰

Both Wang and the reader are left unsure whether this is a reaction of extreme naiveté, or a manipulative act. Wang is very impatient at her foolishness (*chi* 痴) and is frustrated that he has no way to enlighten (*wu* 悟) her. After they get married, he’s afraid she’ll tell others about their sex life, but she does not. She is obsessed by flowers, selling her possessions to buy rare specimens. Her laughter endears her to Wang’s family, who find her a delight to be around.

However, this changes after an incident with a neighbour, who is entranced by her, and takes her laughter as encouragement. When he tries to have sex with her, he finds she vanishes, leaving a hollow tree trunk, within which is a huge scorpion, which stings the man and kills him. The local magistrate is a friend of the Wangs, and so the case is not pursued further, but Mrs Wang remonstrates with Yingning about her wild ways, saying she knew all along she would bring them trouble, and after this rebuke Yingning never laughs again, even when provoked. One day, Wang discovers her in tears, and she asks if

³⁷⁰ In both these passages I have used the translation by Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi in *Selected Tales of Liaozhai* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1984), pp. 46-7.

they could bury her mother properly. They do this, and after this, every Qingming Festival, they go to pay their respects at her grave. A year after the funeral Yingning gives birth to a son, who laughs just like his mother.

The narrative comment at the end of this story points out that while Yingning's unceasing foolish laughter gives the impression of someone entirely guileless (*quan wu xin gan* 全無心肝), the trick she played on the neighbour is evidence of her cunning (*xia* 黠). When we see her bitter grief for her mother, we finally realise that her laughter is a cover for her real character. Similar to the 'laughter plant' (笑矣乎) said to incite endless laughter in all who come across it, and which when planted in a yard makes all the other flowers fade, she is incomparable to others, even making the so-called "flower which understands speech" (*jieyu hua* 解語花), a common metaphor for a beautiful woman, seem a mere affectation.

This story has been discussed, perhaps, more than any other of the *Liaozhai* tales. The story has been dramatised for television, and is consistently included in selective anthologies of the *Liaozhai*.³⁷¹ While employing different methods of analysis, commentators on this story seem to agree on at least one point, that Pu Songling's portrayal of Yingning in this tale is generally positive, despite the fact that she caused the death of a neighbour, confirming the generally perceived fear of female sexuality. In one essay, Ma Ruifang even suggests that the eponymous female protagonist is Pu Songling's favorite of all his characters (this theory seems based on Pu's reference to her in the closing lines as 'My Yingning').³⁷² Ma sees her as a pioneer of feminist liberation within the contemporary "feudal" society, and argues that her coy behaviour is a cover for clever manipulation of her lover. As such, Yingning is not genuinely naive, in the sense of the

³⁷¹ It has also been included in each of what are, to date, the most comprehensive English translations of the *Liaozhai* (Herbert Giles, the People's China Publishing House, Panda Press, and The Foreign Languages Press).

³⁷² See Ma Ruifang "Xiao yi hu wo Yingning: *Liaozhai* renwu tan" 笑矣乎我嬰寧：聊齋人物談 in 文史知識 [Laugh, my Yingning: a discussion of characterisation in the *Liaozhai*] in *Wen shi zhishi*, 1996.1 pp 84-6). Despite Ma's argument that this is a statement of Pu's personal attachment to the character, the use of 我 here could also indicate 'our' Yingning, belonging to both the readers and the author.

male protagonists discussed above. She puts on a front of naiveté, but in reality epitomises the generally perceived sexual threat posed by the female. Pretending to be naive is in fact the very opposite of the true naiveté manifested by the male protagonists.

All of the male protagonists discussed above are depicted as sexually naive or immature in some way, either mentally or physically. They are usually contrasted with a sexually experienced female who cures their naiveté, as if guiding them through adolescence.

- Weak and emasculated males

The exploration of physical conflict between male and female roles is not limited merely to the sexual sphere. The stereotypes of the female shrew and helpless male have already been mentioned. The unwillingness of several physically weak male protagonists to take decisive action, or become involved in a fight, is contrasted with the macho heroics either of other minor male characters, or else by powerful women of action.

Foils are provided for weak male counterparts by such women warriors as “Shang Sanguan” (商三官; 2:43), who is required to take on the traditionally male role to avenge her father’s death, in place of a man. Sanguan has two elder brothers who attempt to file lawsuits against the noble who killed their father, but they are unsuccessful because of the murderer’s high status. Unwilling to waste time, Sanguan disguises herself as an actor, flirts with the noble, then seizes the opportunity when they are alone to behead him, before hanging herself. Similarly strong females are described in “The female knight” (Xia nü 俠女; 2:03) and “The farmer’s wife” (Nongfu 農婦; 6:67). However, in none of these tales is the female allowed to retain her femininity, at least as far as sex is concerned: Shang Sanguan commits suicide before her wedding can take place; the female knight has sex very reluctantly, but explicitly “as a repayment of a debt of gratitude,” to provide an heir for her benefactor; and the farmer’s wife tries to beat up a nun friend of hers when she discovers she has been having affairs with men. The

Historian of the Strange confirms that this last tale is hardly a progressive piece of feminist writing, by concluding with the rhetorical question “what was her husband like?” An Dacheng’s weakness is displayed in the way he allows his mother to mistreat his new wife, Shanhu (珊瑚; 7:28), even beating her himself, for allegedly angering his mother. Shanhu is an entirely compliant and respectful daughter-in-law, but nevertheless An moves to sleep in a separate room from her “to show his respect for his mother”. In the end one of An’s aunts takes pity on Shanhu and takes her into her home. Even after a chance meeting with his wife at his aunt’s house, An is still too scared of his mother to say anything. Eventually his mother is won over by her daughter-in-law’s good nature, but it is her sister who facilitates this change of heart, not her son. Such a portrayal of a weak and indecisive male caught between the conflicting requirements of wife and mother is also common in the shrew tales mentioned above.

The first degree graduate Feng Xiangru 馮相如 falls in love with “Hongyu” (紅玉; 2:16) but is weak and ineffectual and so, when his father opposes their relationship, he complies, relying on Hongyu to arrange for him to marry someone else. When an old rich lord, Song 宋, tries to buy his wife from him, Feng simply declines politely, suppressing his anger. Feng’s father loses his temper, and Song sends people round to beat up the Fengs and abduct Feng’s wife. In the end, Feng’s father is killed and his wife commits suicide. Thinking of his young son, Feng still does nothing to avenge the deaths. A stranger tells Feng he will avenge them on his behalf and so Feng flees with his son. The stranger murders Song and his family, but Feng is the principal suspect, and when he is arrested his son is abandoned at the roadside, crying. Imprisoned, Feng is now stripped of his degree and tortured. The magistrate is warned in a dream and when Feng is finally released, Hongyu turns up, having mysteriously found his son for him. She then lives with them, working as the breadwinner and managing all affairs while Feng studies, until he finally passes the provincial examination. While her behind the scenes role throughout the narrative is not always explicit, it is clear that Hongyu is in control.

Although to the contemporary readership, it is fair to assume that Feng's behaviour would have been seen as cowardly and weak, *Liaozhai* tales which conclude like this one, with the protagonist proceeding another step up the examination ladder, demonstrate implicit approval of the character. For Pu Songling, examination candidates frequently appear to be emasculated in some way. In Feng's case, he is weak and unwilling to take action in society. In the story of Zhou Kechang (周克昌; 6:09), there is the suggestion that sexual fulfillment and success in the exams are somehow incompatible.

A spoilt child, Zhou often neglects his studies and plays truant from school, but his parents refuse to scold him. One day he disappears. After a year or so he returns, saying that he was taken away by a Daoist priest, but eventually managed to escape. Thereafter, his studies go very well, he quickly gains the *xiucai* degree, and suddenly many families want to marry their daughters to him. After refusing many proposals, he finally marries the daughter of a *jinshi* degree holder and, while they get along well together, he insists on sleeping alone. Under pressure from his parents to produce a grandson, he eventually leaves, saying that he will send someone who can fulfill their wishes. He disappears, and the next day the real Zhou Kechang returns -- he was sold to a rich childless businessman, who has subsequently had his own child, and so has been allowed to return. He is still lax at his studies, but since no-one finds out about the swap, he retains the academic title the imposter has won for him, and has a sexually fulfilling relationship with his wife, producing a child within a year. Sexual abstention is also linked to success in the exams in the tale 'Listening to the Mirror' (Jing ting 鏡聽; 5:28). The main theme of this plot concerns a man's attempt to pass the provincial exam, despite his own parents' lack of faith in his abilities. His wife, the female protagonist, takes charge and, by refusing her husband sex, enables him to study harder and ultimately pass the exam.

A different form of contrast to the weak male scholar is provided by the peasant boy Yu Jiang (于江; 2:44) who is grief-stricken when his father is killed by a wolf. Still a teenager, he vows to take revenge and, using a combination of clever strategies, manages to kill three adult wolves single-handedly. The strangeness to the urban literati of this

type of success is encapsulated in the Historian of the Strange's exclamation, "Who'd have thought a peasant boy would be so brave?" The uneducated peasant boy is just as much a contrast for the typical weak male scholar stereotype, as is the more prevalent figure of the strong female.

Physical weakness and abstention from sex both imply a diminishment of the traditional male role. Prolonged participation in the exam system, studying in isolation for long periods, and then repeatedly confining oneself to the stultifying atmosphere of the examination halls only to meet with successive failures, were all common practice to many literati of the period. It would be a fascinating subject of further research to survey to what extent such conditions did emasculate such candidates, either in their own eyes or in the view of society around them.

- Money and managerial incompetence

Dealing with money, running businesses and managing household affairs are skills which require a level of sophistication and worldly wisdom beyond many of the naive protagonists in the tales.

A generally negative attitude to the pursuit of wealth pervades the collection, and is demonstrated in the tale "Coin Rain" (Yuqian 雨錢; 3:33). The fox spirit Hu Yangzhen 胡養真 admires a scholar for his refinement, and so befriends him, often engaging in erudite discussion with him. However, when one day the scholar asks him for help to become rich, he becomes very disillusioned and leaves, saying if he was only interested in money, he should befriend thieves. Jia Zilong 賈子龍 almost ruins his friendship with the immortal scholar Zhen (真生; 7:10) by tricking him into showing him how to turn a large rock into silver. Zhen then has to plead with him to perform charitable deeds on his behalf, to counteract his greed. Zhang Buliang (張不量; 6:50) is commended by heaven for not reckoning grain debts and rewarded when his fields remain undamaged after a storm. When Chen Huafeng 陳華封 wants to make personal gain from his knowledge of

the antidote to the cattle plague (牛癘; 5:29) the cure loses its effectiveness on his own livestock.

All of these instances condemn the selfish or greedy use of money, and are in line with orthodox Confucian values. Misers are frequent objects of fun in Chinese literature, while rich magistrates who abuse their wealth are roundly condemned. However, money is not despised per se, and the skills of running a household and effective management were also necessary for the Confucian scholar. According to the *Great Learning* (Daxue 大學), one of the four main canons of Neo-Confucian education and, in Ming and Qing times, one of the primary texts upon which the exam papers were based, the different stages and ultimate aim of self-cultivation are set out clearly: the investigation of things leads on to knowledge, which in turn leads to sincerity in mind, and then to rightness of mind, which leads to physical well-being. The reward of this is that now you are able first to set your house/family in order, then to be able rule the country and finally to pacify all under heaven.³⁷³ Being able to set one's house in order was therefore a prerequisite for candidates wishing to serve their country in higher offices and setting one's house in order inevitably required a level of practicality and financial nous. Ever since the rapid urbanisation of the Song dynasty, the social status of merchants had been gradually improving and by the early Qing, while businessmen were still despised by many among the scholarly elite, the social stigma attached to trading in material goods was far less widespread.³⁷⁴

Pu Songling himself was well aware of the necessity to strike a balance between the business of making a livelihood and studying. His father had been forced to give up his studies and become a merchant, for the sake of his family's livelihood. Small-time

³⁷³ This hierarchy is related in the opening paragraphs of the *Daxue* p.1.

³⁷⁴ Timothy Brook has described the elevation of the role of the merchant in the late Ming period, and the gradual erosion of the barrier between merchant and gentry classes. Brook cites one scholar, Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525-93) who went so far as to insist that studying and trading were complementary: "It is not until a man is repeatedly frustrated that he gives up his studies and takes up trade. After he has accumulated substantial savings he encourages his descendants, in planning for their future, to give up trade and take up studies. Trade and studies thus alternate with each other." *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) p. 215.

merchants and entrepreneurs in the *Liaozhai* are rarely condemned, but the widespread greed and corruption of wealthy businessmen and magistrates are repeatedly criticised. Salt barons were renowned for their corrupt exploitative methods, and were particularly targeted in this criticism. The story of the small-time salt merchant Wang Shi (王十; 8:25) encapsulates attitudes to the contrasting types of businessman. When Wang is en route to sell some salt, demon envoys carry him off to the underworld, telling him that while it is not yet time for him to die permanently, he must go and work there for a while, as a penalty for being a salt peddler. The widespread fear of profiteers is demonstrated by Wang's initial assumption that he has been ambushed by servants of the notorious local salt baron who want to steal his goods. On arrival in the underworld, he discovers the salt baron is also there, and has been put to work cleaning a sewer. As soon as King Yama sees him, he angrily rebukes his envoys, saying "The real salt profiteers are those who avoid paying taxes, or harm the lives of ordinary people. Those the unscrupulous officials and opportunistic businessmen refer to as illegal salt peddlars, are in fact all good, honest people. How can you call it profiteering when a poor man invests a tiny amount of capital, to make a miniscule profit?" At this, Wang is appointed as overseer of the sewer cleaning. He does this for three days, and treats the baron mercilessly. When they both revive, the baron is terrified of Wang, and quickly gives up his business.

Several male protagonists are unable to function effectively with regard to money: some are naively generous and trusting of others, and so are repeatedly exploited, even at a cost to their own family; some are unable to work hard, either through laziness or lack of interest; others are simply incapable and do not possess the necessary 'business mindset' or social skills. As in the previous section, naive males of this type are often portrayed in contrast to highly efficient, socially adept females.

Wang Cheng's (王成; 1:38) two most outstanding attributes are his honesty and his laziness. The former brings him good fortune when a fox spirit rewards him for returning a hairpin she had lost. She tells him to invest it in linen, then go to the capital to sell it at a large profit. Lacking any business acumen, he shelters from a rainstorm en route to the

market, losing ten days. When he eventually gets round to selling the linen, he makes a loss. The next day he discovers his wallet has been stolen while he slept. Once again, his good-natured refusal to put any blame on the innkeeper has its reward and the innkeeper gives him some money, with which he buys quails, to sell for fighting contests. Unfortunately it starts raining again, and they all begin dying off, with only one remaining. Wang is about to kill himself in despair, but then, at the innkeeper's suggestion, he trains it to fight. It wins consistently, and he eventually sells it for six hundred taels, pays the innkeeper what he owed him, and returns home. The fox spirit makes him invest the money in land, and build a house. She stays with him for three years to make sure he is able to run the household properly, and doesn't return to his old ways, before she leaves. The Historian of the Strange comments at the end that wealth usually only comes from hard work, so this must be an exceptional case, due to Wang's honest nature.

Devout Buddhist parents decide to educate their daughter, Xiao'er (小兒; 2:45), alongside her brother. The father then becomes involved in the White Lotus sect, and his whole family follows, participating in the 1622 rebellion led by Xu Hongru 徐鴻儒. Xiao'er's great aptitude for learning leads to her selection as one of Xu Hongru's seven closest female disciples, and she becomes highly skilled in Daoist arts. A former admirer of hers, Ding Zimo 丁紫陌, then arrives and persuades her that the sect is false, and they escape together, by means of Xiao'er's Daoist magic. From this point onwards, Xiao'er's combination of Daoist arts and business acumen is pivotal to the couple's future. When their neighbours initially refuse to lend the couple any capital, Xiao'er conjures up a 'judge from hell', and deludes a man into giving away a large amount of money. They thus become economically independent. When thirteen hoodlums break into their house, again it is Xiao'er who saves the situation and sends them packing, first cautioning them that they will not get away with their lives if it happens again. She also uses her Daoist magic to protect her family against an environmental catastrophe caused by a plague of locusts. She later proves her managerial skills to be "better than most men" when she opens a glass factory, employing the entire local population. Although she never covers

her face when she goes out, no-one dares look at her or take advantage and, under her management, even in times of famine, no-one starves.

Xiao'er is contrasted with her male counterpart, in her conformity to the Wang Yangming ideal of the unity of knowledge and action [*zhi xing he yi* 知行合一]. While Ding initially goes to rescue her from her from what would have meant certain death with the White Lotus sect (after Xu Hongru's defeat, the whole group, including Xiao'er's family, are arrested and then executed by the authorities), he lacks the practical skills to facilitate even the initial escape, and their subsequent life is entirely dependent on Xiao'er's abilities.

A striking tale of successful female management skills is "Qiu Daniang" (仇大娘; 7:25). After Qiu Zhong's capture by bandits, his family is persistently intimidated by a local man, Wei Ming, who has long since borne a grudge against them. Wei pretends to befriend the ineffectual eldest son, Qiu Fu, and leads him to start gambling, until he stakes his own wife, and loses. She tries to kill herself and Qiu Fu runs off in terror. Wei, delighted with his success, finally arranges for the return of one of Qiu Fu's step-sisters, referred to as Qiu Daniang, who is notorious for her shrew-like qualities, believing that this will destroy the family. In the event, her intimidating nature serves the family well, as she runs the household finances superbly, and no-one dares take advantage of them again. She is contrasted with the men of the house, who are portrayed as pathetically incompetent in the face of Wei's bullying and scheming.

Another strong woman of action who is contrasted with a weak male counterpart, is Huo nü (霍女; 6:15), a kind of female Robin Hood, whose self-proclaimed aim in life is "to bankrupt misers, and to cheat evil-doers (吝者則破之，于邪者則誑之也)". Having ruined one rich miser, she runs off and moves in with a poor scholar, Huang 黃, and they live together happily. She works hard running the household, and also devises a money-earning scheme, pretending to sell herself to one rich man, then escaping with a large profit, even fooling Huang in the process. The Historian's comment at the end of this tale

also shows approval saying that, although she is evidently not a chaste woman, the way she dealt with misers and evil-doers shows she is not completely heartless (非無心者也).

The contrasting responses of the male and female characters in the tale “Geomancy” (Kanyu 堪輿; 4:34) indicate a disparate level of emotional maturity and ability to cooperate with others in dealing with household affairs. Song Junchu is a geomancer who has educated his whole family, including his daughters-in-law, in the ways of geomancy. After his death, each of his two sons engage separate geomancers to give advice on the suitability of various burial sites. However, when each receives contradictory instructions, the brothers fall out with each other. They fight over this issue, until they reach a stalemate, with the result that their father is not buried at all. They build tents and houses around the coffin to protect it from the elements, but the quarrel is never resolved, until both of the sons themselves die. After this, their wives get together, examine both possible burial sites and proclaim neither to be suitable. They engage a different geomancer who makes various suggestions, each of which they consider carefully. After vetoing most of the proposals, they finally accept one, bury their father-in-law and settle this matter in a mature, co-operative manner.

Scholar Lian 廉生 is a poor honest orphan and when Mrs. Liu (劉夫人; 7:06) approaches him to ask him to manage her finances for him, he tries to refuse, because he is worried he will be unable to cope in the business world. When he realises the huge sums of money involved, he is still more terrified. Mrs. Liu tells him “If you plan to study, the first thing to do is to make a living.” These words of wisdom apparently still rang true a century or so after Pu Songling’s death, as Dan Minglun comments on this line “Although these words have some grammatical problems, they still are absolutely correct.”³⁷⁵ She finds Lian a servant, Wu 伍, who has spent all his life doing business and Lian entrusts all the money to him. The combination of Lian’s honesty and generosity and Wu’s business acumen seems to work well and the business is successful, but Lian never shows much interest in it, preferring to read. When one of Mrs. Liu’s hoodlum grandsons breaks

³⁷⁵ For Dan Minglun’s commentary see LZYY, p.1882.

in to his house he hands over the money to him. The grandson is caught, and later dies in prison. Lian still continues to help out his widow and children. At the end of the story, Lian passes the provincial level of the imperial exams. In the very last line of the tale, the narrator warns about the similarity in the two characters ‘poverty’ (pin 貧) and ‘greed’ (tan 貪). It is very unlikely that Lian would have succeeded and become rich on account of his honesty alone, but this quality was what secured him the services of a skilled servant who could manage his business. Wu’s role, as a socially disempowered servant who is nevertheless a competent and worldly wise manager, is identical to that of the female business-minded characters in the other tales discussed here, and similarly provides a contrast to the honest, simple-minded scholar Lian.

Business dealings and household management require a level of sophistication rarely possessed by these naive male protagonists. While Pu Songling does not despise merchants or their profession, he repeatedly stresses the virtues of honesty and generosity, and upholds naiveté as a positive virtue, and the trademark of the serious scholar.

- Studying

The vast majority of *Liaozhai* protagonists are described as scholars (*sheng* 生). Given Pu Songling’s own background, and the fact that his immediate audience consisted of other members of the Shandong literary circles, this is hardly surprising. As in Pu’s own case, the cyclical process of studying for, and then traveling to sit, the various levels of examination, could take over an individual’s whole life. As illustrated in many of the tales, even marriage was often put on hold until the prospective husband had achieved a certain degree. Encouraged by Confucian maxims such as “Study like you will never attain it, as if you are afraid you will lose it,”³⁷⁶ obsessive attitudes towards studying were not uncommon among this sector of society.

³⁷⁶ 學如不及，猶恐失之 *Analects* 8:17.

One comment on education in the late imperial period is particularly illuminating for my study here, since it demonstrates the strong social aspect of teaching and, by implication, studying: “‘Teaching’ tended generally to mean the production or reproduction of a highly literate elite and the socialization of the far less literate, or even illiterate, common people by means of exhortations and rituals.”³⁷⁷ The utilitarian aspect of education, of learning to be a social being was always controversial. Confucius himself had lamented that, “In the past people studied for their own sake, nowadays people study for others.”³⁷⁸ This controversy is to some extent encapsulated in the perceived contradictions between ‘pure’ scholarship, and examination success. Such a conflict, clearly an issue for Pu himself, is portrayed in several of the tales.

In what follows, I will analyse the attitudes and behaviour of some of the many scholar-protagonists in the *Liaozhai*, both with regard to reading and studying *per se*, and in the wider setting of performance in the examinations. Both these demonstrate further aspects of the childlikeness of the collection.

The different possible levels of interpretation of any given text can indicate varying degrees of maturity or sophistication in readers. For example, children and young readers are often entirely unaware of satirical overtones in novels, reading and accepting them unquestionably as fact. An unsophisticated adult reader may equally well overlook deeper levels of meaning in texts, and this will in no way hamper his ability to memorise and reproduce them. Much criticism of the eight-legged essay (*baguwen* 八股文) requirement in the examinations was precisely that the skills tested were purely those of superficial rote learning and imitation and that creativity, or individual interpretations, were actively discouraged.

However, this type of ‘naive’ approach to reading should be distinguished from the idealised naiveté of Li Zhi’s childlike mind. Li argued that the greatness of the sages of

³⁷⁷ This definition is provided by Alexander Woodside and Benjamin Elman, in the introduction to their conference volume *Education and Society in Late Imperial China*, p. 3.

³⁷⁸ 古之學者為己，今之學者為人。 *Analects* 14:24.

ancient times was their ability to preserve their childlike mind, however much they read. He contrasted them to the scholars of his day, who read voraciously, but whose purpose in reading was to learn about duty and principles which then distanced them from their childlike minds.³⁷⁹

As early as the Song dynasty, Lu Jiuyuan and the philosophers of the school of the mind had warned against the limitations of taking things too literally: "A student must make up his mind. To read books and merely understand their literal meanings means not to have made up one's mind."³⁸⁰ Wang Yangming also warned of the dangers of doing this, in a response to Chen Jiuchuan's 陳九川 objection that while he could understand the requirements of a certain task in his mind, according to the books he had read, they made no sense. At this Wang replied "It is only necessary for it to make sense to the mind. If the mind understands it, books will surely come along. If it does not make sense to the mind but only does so according to a literal interpretation of books, then one will have all kinds of subjective ideas."³⁸¹ All these philosophers concurred that books were not an end in themselves, and one's mind (however differently they defined this) should not be subjugated to them.

Many of the *Liaozhai* stories play with literal and non-literal interpretations of language. The relationship between the literal interpretation of characters and their intended meaning is continually challenged. To use Saussure's terms, it is an exploration of the relationship between the signifiers and the signified. Karl Kao has discussed the phenomena of 'metonymic association' and 'matrix expansion' in the collection and notes the number of tales which reverse the usual direction of the allegoric tale giving rise to a proverb: "a matrix system of the signifier (verbal or visual representation), which is static or constitutes an abbreviated text, is animated and expanded by narrativization within a framework suggested by the matrix.... The *Liaozhai* tales transform the 'sign' to

³⁷⁹ See chapter 3 for a full translation of Li's essay "Tongxin shuo".

³⁸⁰ Translated by Wing-tsit Chan, op. cit., p. 584.

³⁸¹ Wang Wencheng gong quan shu, chuanxi lu xia juan 3 p. 5, translated in *Instructions*, p. 197.

‘the thing’ it signifies.”³⁸² In Kao’s analysis, the purpose of this deliberate reworking of linguistic and rhetorical associations is the generation of a new kind of “strangeness aesthetics.” I would further argue that this playful use of language also illustrates another aspect of childlikeness in the collection, a deliberate adoption of interpretations inappropriate to the context.

Some of this wordplay consists of fairly straightforward transferral such as the large number of foxes whose surname is Hu (a phonetic pun on the word for ‘fox’), or Scholar Liu (柳生; 5:39) turning out to be a willow tree spirit (the literal meaning of his surname). There are also more complex usages, in which the whole tale turns on the deciphering of the linguistic code. In “The Laolong boatmen” (老龍舡戶; 8:42) the solution to a multiple murder case depends on the unravelling of a riddle told to the provincial governor in a dream. The four characters of the words ‘Laolong boatmen’ are described in turn, and the governor eventually works out the riddle, and arrests around fifty boatmen from the Laolong ford, who confess to the crimes. In “Clues from poetry” (詩讖; 6:23) Wu Feiqing 吳蜚卿, wrongly accused of murder, is told in a dream not to kill himself, as “now there is a good omen inside”. Only when his case is overturned by a newly appointed just magistrate and the real murderer arrested, does Wu realise that this refers to the surname of the magistrate, Zhou 周, which includes the ideogram for good fortune 吉. The Chinese script particularly lends itself to these puns and riddles, which can work on the level of a single character, a word, or a whole phrase, and can be based on phonetic similarity or the visual complexity of the characters.

As such, the potential for misinterpretation is great. As any student of Chinese language knows, it is quite possible to understand every character in a sentence, while entirely missing the meaning of the whole.

This conflict between ‘real’ understanding and superficial or literal understanding is also an issue in learning in the wider sense. A mature approach to learning would be one

³⁸² Kao, “Projection”, p. 206.

which demonstrated interest in long-term education rather than short-term quick gains, and was open to different learning environments, rather than simply relying on books.

One of the most well-known and popular of the *Liaozhai* tales, “The Daoist priest of Mt. Lao” (勞山道士; 1:15), tells the story of the young scholar, Wang 王, who asks the priest to teach him Daoist arts. Warning Wang of the need to be serious in his study, and not simply to treat the arts as magic tricks, the priest agrees to teach him how to run through walls. As expected, on Wang’s return home, he boasts of his skills, attempts to show off to his wife, and injures himself.

A different learning experience is described in the tale “Fendie” (粉蝶; 8:62). When the protagonist Yang Yuedan’s 陽旦旦 boat capsizes and he arrives at a Daoist paradise island, he meets his late cousin Yan 宴. Yang sees a zither on the shelf and asks to hear some tunes. Yan’s wife, Shiniang 十娘, asks him what he would like to hear, but he replies “I have never read *Melodies of the zither*³⁸³ and so I really don’t know what I would like to hear.”

At this, she replied: “But if you choose a topic at will, I can make up a tune accordingly.”

Yang said with a smile: “Boats blown by the sea wind: can you make a tune out of that too?”

Shiniang replied: “I can.”

She then began to pluck the strings and play, just as if she had a score, and in her mind she adjusted the undulating harmonies; as he became calm he began to feel as though he was back in the boat, being rocked and rolled by the gale.

Completely astonished, Yang asked “Can I learn it?”

Shiniang handed him the zither, and had a go at teaching him the positions known as the hook and the pluck, then said “It would be possible to teach you. What do you want to learn?”

He replied: “How long would it take me to learn the ‘Gale melody’ you have just played? Please first write down the tune, and then sing it through for me.”

Shiniang said: “There is no written score for this, I just worked out the score in my mind.”

³⁸³ The authorship of this classic has been ascribed to Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192). It anthologises various songs and melodies, listing their origin and authorship.

Thereupon she took another zither, and made the positions for the hook and the pick, and got Yang to copy them. Yang practised for over three hours, and only after it sounded vaguely harmonious did the couple leave. Yang put all his attention on it, and practised under the candlelight; after a long time, he suddenly underwent a miraculous enlightenment, and began dancing spontaneously.”

The dangers of over-reliance on book learning are thus satirised, leading to a condition symptomatic of a commonly cited criticism of traditional scholars, that the heavy focus on rote learning renders them scarcely able to function independently of the written word.

This criticism is often specifically targeted at the practice of eight-legged essay writing, and the provincial level examinations. When Wu Qing'an 吳青庵, a child prodigy, fails the exams, the local court historian promises him the hand of his daughter in marriage if he can succeed within three years. Another temptation is introduced, however, in the form of the immortal Bai Yuyu (白于玉; 2:35), who tries to persuade Wu that reaching immortality is more important than either sex, sons, or success in the exams. Bai himself is a *xiucai* who refuses to learn eight-legged essays and is disillusioned with the mechanisms of the examination system. In the end, Wu's desires are fulfilled when he has sex with an immortal, has a son by her, then retires to become a hermit.

A young man, who remains anonymous, marries an intelligent orphan girl, Miss Yan (Yan shi 顏氏; 4:49). Despite her tutoring, he is unable to grasp the intricacies of the eight-legged essay and fails the civil service exams in successive years. In the end Yan persuades him to let her dress up as his younger brother, and sit the exams. At the next sitting, they both take the exams: she gains first place, while he fails outright. She then progresses up the system, gaining a high position, while keeping the secret of her gender hidden, ignoring various marriage proposals. Only after the Ming was overthrown do the couple reveal the truth to a relative. Yan's sex is verified by checking the size of her feet. Thereafter, she passes on her title to her husband, and resumes the life of a woman, dressing in female clothing and remaining indoors.

At first reading, this tale could be seen as a positive portrayal of a female who not only assumes the role of tutor to her husband, but further goes on to prove her superiority over him in that very male setting, the examination hall. However, one detail in the ending which partially betrays this is the fact that Miss Yan seems to have sacrificed her sexuality for her intellectual goal -- she never has any children, and her husband does not take a concubine.

The numerous instances in traditional fiction of poetry composing contests or couplet finishing drinking games demonstrate the priority placed on the witty manipulation of language. The naive scholar character is at a loss when faced with such wit, often demonstrated by a female. In "Fox clique" (Hu lian 狐聯; 2:14) a scholar is reduced to a laughing stock by two fox spirits. When he attempts to rebuke them for their inappropriate flirtatious behaviour, they hold an impromptu poetry composing contest, which they then win with ease and leave, laughing. A more positive depiction of a similar type of female wit can be found in the tale "Fox humour" (Hu xie 狐諧; 3:32). The fox spirit in this case has a secret affair with a young man who is as yet unsuccessful in the exams, reportedly due to bad luck. She amazes his friends by her witty puns, taking particular delight in playing on the characters of their names. In the end, her brothers arrive to take her home and, against the young man's wishes, she goes with them.

- Conclusion ~ "The Book Fool"

A variation on the theme of the inept male, in which ignorance of the sexual act is contrasted with an obsessive thirst for knowledge and books, is the tale 'The book fool' (Shu Chi 書痴; 7:35). In many ways this story is itself a study of naiveté, combining many of the themes discussed in this chapter. The tale has been mentioned by both Barr and Zeitlin but the specific analogies drawn between educational stagnation and sexual abrogation merit a closer reading and so I have translated and annotated the story in full below.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ See Barr's "Pu Songling and *Liaozhai zhiyi*" p.220 and Zeitlin, *Historian*, p. 95 and p. 97.

Lang Yuzhu 郎玉株 came from Pengcheng 彭城, the descendant of a prefect, who had been honest in his post, and did not use his salary to try to accumulate wealth, but instead had amassed enough books to fill his house. Yuzhu himself was particularly foolish (*chi* 痴)³⁸⁵: his family was impoverished, and he sold absolutely everything, except for his father's book collection, of which he was unwilling to part with a single *juan*. When his father was alive, he had written out the poem "Exhortations to Study" and had pasted it to the right of his seat, and Lang recited this daily; he even covered it with a piece of white gauze, afraid it would fade away.

"Exhortations to study (Quan xue pian 勸學篇)" is the title of a ten line poem, by the Song 宋 emperor Zhenzong 眞宗 (r. 998-1022), which reads as follows: "To enrich your household there is no need to buy good fields; in books are stored a thousand kinds of grain. To live peacefully there is no need for lofty halls; in books are found rooms of gold. When you wish to marry don't rue the fact that there are no good matchmakers; in books are found jade-like beauties. When you leave the house don't fret that you lack an entourage; in books chariots and horses are abundant. If a man desires to follow his life's ambition, then he should read the five classics dilligently, facing the window."³⁸⁶ Throughout the tale, Yuzhu repeatedly takes this poem literally, and believes that he will find all the items mentioned physically within his library. When such items seem to appear, he is further confirmed in his naive faith in the poem. One reason for this poem's influence on Yuzhu is his father's pasting it "to the right of his seat," since "an inscription to the right of one's seat (*zuo you ming* 座右銘)" was a traditional reference to a text which provides instruction and encouragement for a person through his life. Once again, this is a deliberate and playful inversion of a metaphor, which Yuzhu takes unquestioningly at a literal level.

Not interested in working for the sake of a salary, he literally believed that there really was gold and grain in books. He read by day and by night, regardless of the seasons. Although he was over twenty years old, he still did not seek a marriage partner, hoping for a beauty to emerge from his books. When guests or relatives came to see him, he never knew the correct etiquette of how to greet them, so after saying a few words he would start to recite great works at them, and they would take their leave, in embarrassment. Every time the provincial education

³⁸⁵ See chapter 6 of this thesis for a comprehensive discussion of this term.

³⁸⁶ The text of this poem is given in LZZY p. 2108.

commissioner came to give the preliminary inspection, Yuzhu was rated first, but he sadly never passed the provincial exam.

Yuzhu's social ineptitude is encapsulated here, in his incapability even of greeting family members appropriately. As with so many of the *Liaozhai* tales, it is the provincial level exam which proves to be the stumbling block for this naive protagonist, as it was for Pu Songling himself.

All of a sudden one day, while he was studying, his book was blown away by a strong gust of wind. Lunging after it, he stumbled and put his foot through a hole in the floor; on further investigation, he found the hole to be full of rotten straw; digging this out, it turned out to be where people of old had once stored grain, but the grain had all decomposed into compost. Despite the fact that it was inedible, it deepened his faith that the 'thousand kinds of grain' theory was not obsolete, and he studied with extra vigour.

One day, at the top of his ladder, he found a miniature golden imperial carriage, about a foot long, among some loose volumes. Delighted, he took this as proof of the 'rooms of gold.' When he took this out and showed it to people, they told him it was only gold-plated, not real gold. Secretly, he bemoaned the ancients for cheating him. Not long after, a man who graduated in the same year as his father became surveillance commissioner of the prefecture. He was an admirer of Buddhism. Someone persuaded Lang to donate the carriage as a stand for a Buddha statue. The commissioner was delighted, and presented Lang with three hundred pieces of gold and twenty-four horses. Lang was pleased, believing that the golden house, the chariots and horses had all been proved, and so became more diligent at his studies than ever. But he was already thirty years old. Someone tried to persuade him to take a wife, but he responded "Since 'in books are found jade-like beauties', why should I be worried about not having a beautiful wife?" He studied for a further two or three years, but never with anything to show for it, and people all ridiculed him. At that time there was a rumour going round that the Weaving Maid in Heaven had run off. Someone teased Lang, saying "I bet it was you that the granddaughter of Heaven³⁸⁷ was running off after!" Lang knew he was joking, so thought no more of it.

One evening, half-way through the eighth volume of the *History of the Han*, he saw a silk cutting of a beautiful girl stuck within the pages. Astonished he exclaimed "Can this be the answer to the riddle of the jade-like beauties contained within books?" He became disheartened. Looking closely at the beautiful woman, she looked real: on her back were the faint tiny characters which said "Weaving

³⁸⁷ The 'granddaughter of Heaven' (Tiansun 天孫) is another term for the Weaving Maid.

Maid". He was incredulous. Every day he placed her on top of that volume, repeatedly gazing or playing so that he forgot to eat and sleep.

One day, just as he was staring at her, the beauty suddenly bent her waist upwards, and sat on top of the book, smiling at him coyly.³⁸⁸ Lang was terrified, and hid under the desk. By the time he'd got back up, she was already over a foot tall. Even more petrified, he hit his head against the floor. When she got down from the desk and stood before him, he saw that she really was a matchless beauty. Bowing he asked her "Which goddess are you?" The beauty replied with a smile: "I'm Yan Ruyu, you've known me for a long time. Having been the object of your daily infatuation, I was afraid that if I didn't make an appearance, no-one this millenium would ever again believe sincerely in the ancients."

Since the literal meaning of this girl's name, Yan Ruyu 顏如玉, is 'beauty like jade', Yuzhu is naturally delighted. The probable significance of her location within the eighth *juan* of the *History of the Han* is in reference to the discussion in this section about the self-sacrificial nature of true love between husband and wife. "Even if there is a catastrophe, the one will risk death to preserve the other. Sincere love is knotted around the heart, and is the extreme of benevolence and generosity."³⁸⁹ Yan's explanation, that her motive for appearing to Yuzhu was to encourage people to 'believe sincerely' (*du xin* 篤信) in the ancients is entirely in accord with Yuzhu's naive sincerity, and he is understandably pleased.

Lang was delighted, and followed her to the bed. Although they were intimate together, Lang did not know how to make love.

Presumably sensing that Yuzhu's naiveté is such that he is not even yet ready to learn about sex, Yan does not begin to instruct him until later.

Whenever he studied, he made the girl sit beside him. She warned him not to study, but he wouldn't listen. She said to him "The reason you are unable to gain promotion is simply because of your studying. Look at the rolls of honour for the

³⁸⁸ Another instance of things literally coming out of books occurs in the tale 'The hibernating dragon' (Zhi long 蟄龍; 2:26) when a tiny creature emerges from amongst magistrate Qu's 曲 books. After Qu ceremonially pays his respects to it, it suddenly turns into a dragon and flies off.

³⁸⁹ 雖有患禍，猶蒙死而存之。誠愛結于心，仁厚之至也。From the Records of Emperor Xuan, no.8 *Han shu* 漢書 [History of the Former Han] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) p. 251.

provincial and metropolitan exams! How many of these people study as hard as you? If you don't listen to me, I'm leaving."

This is a fascinating insight into the conflicting requirements of diligent study, and performance in the examinations.

Lang took her advice for a while, but soon he forgot her instruction, and began to recite aloud again. Before long, he looked for her, but she had vanished. At his wits' end, he tried to entreat her with prayers, but could find no trace of her. Suddenly he remembered her original hiding place, took out the *History of the Han* and looked through it carefully, till he reached the same spot as before, and sure enough, there she was. He called out to her but she remained motionless, so he prostrated himself and implored her bitterly. She finally came down and said "But if you don't listen to me again, we'll be parted forever!" She got out the gambling games, and played with him daily. But Lang could not keep his attention on it. When he saw that she was not there, he secretly continued reading. Afraid that the girl would discover this, he took out the eighth volume of the *History of the Han*, and replaced it out of order, in another place to confuse her. One day, absorbed in his book, the girl came in without him noticing; he suddenly saw her, and rushed to cover up the book, but she had already disappeared. Terrified, he painstakingly searched through all the *juan*, but he could not find her; then, he found her once again in the eighth volume of the *History of the Han*, on the correct page. At this he kowtowed to her again, swearing resolutely not to study again. Only then did the girl come down and she began to play Go with him, saying "If you haven't mastered it within three days, then I'll leave again." By the third day, he suddenly beat the girl by two pieces.

By teaching him the rules of Go, Yan is beginning the complex process of socialising her pupil, Yuzhu. He is obviously intelligent enough to learn the game well, but what he is really learning here is the art of interaction with another person, albeit a supernatural one, rather than a book.

The girl was happy, and began to teach him how to play the zither, demanding that he master one tune within five days. Lang had to put all his concentration onto his hands and his eyes, and he had no time to do anything else: after a long time, he could follow a tune with his fingers, and without realising it, began to feel excited. The girl drank and gambled with him every day, and Lang accordingly started to enjoy himself and forgot about studying.

Although learning to play music is not a social skill per se, except where used to entertain others, it requires a creative ability which Yuzhu had never required before. Together with his new-found hobbies of drinking and gambling, he is now able to interact with others, and has lost much of the foolishness (*chi*, see next chapter) that prevented him from socialising.

The girl then urged him to go out and made him entertain people. From this point on, he suddenly gained a reputation as a playboy. The girl said, "Now you can go and take the examinations."

This abrupt juxtaposition of becoming a socialite as a qualification for taking the provincial examination is indicative of the requirement for candidates at this stage in their careers to progress from an idealised, naive, childlike state to become a socially adept, worldly wise 'adult'.

One night Lang said to the girl: "Generally, when a man and a woman live together they produce offspring: I've been living with you for some time, why are we not like that?" The girl laughed and said: "I did tell you studying day after day would do you no good. You've got to the chapter on the relations between husbands and wives, but you're still ignorant of the arts of the bedchamber." Lang asked with surprise "What arts are they?" The girl laughed and did not reply. After a while, she secretly guided him into her. Lang was ecstatic and exclaimed "I had no idea that the joy of a husband and wife was something which could not be transmitted in words."

In this, Yuzhu's final lesson in maturity, he loses his absolute faith in linguistic expression alongside his virginity.

After this, he told this to every person he met and everybody had to disguise their laughter. When the girl found out she reproached him. Lang said "If you scuttle about doing shameful deeds, then you must keep it a secret; the joy in a natural human relationship is common to everyone, so why not talk about it?"

After eight or nine months, the girl gave birth to a son, and they employed a nurse to raise him. One day, the girl said to Lang: "I've been with you for two years now, and have given you a child, we can now part. If I stay longer I am worried I will bring you disaster, and then it will be too late for regrets." When Lang heard

her words, he collapsed in tears and was unable to get up, saying "Don't you even consider our baby?" The girl was also distraught, and after a long time said "If you really want me to stay, you must throw away all your books." Lang said "These books are your home, and are also my life. Why are you asking me to do that?" The girl did not persist, but said "I also know this is fate, so I can only prewarn you."

Previously, if Lang's relatives ever caught a glimpse of the girl, they were always astonished, and never having heard of her family background, they all interrogated him. Lang could not lie to them, but remained silent. So people became all the more suspicious, and the rumours abounded, until Lord Shi 史, the district magistrate, heard of them. Shi was from Fujian, and had become a *jinsshi* in his youth. When he heard of her he set off, privately wanting to have a look at this beauty and intending to get to her by detaining Lang. When the girl heard of this, she immediately vanished. The prefect was angry and arrested Lang, and stripped him of his *shengyuan* degree and put him in shackles, to force the girl's whereabouts out of him. Lang, close to death, said nothing. They tied up his maid, who gave a vague account. The steward thought it was the work of demons, and ordered a carriage and went personally to Lang's house. He saw that the house was filled with books, too many to search through, and burnt them; the smoke in the yard did not disperse, remaining dark, like a heavy cloud.

As his book collection is destroyed, Yuzhu's growing up process also is completed. He now is a fully functioning adult, able to hold an official post, and even manipulate his power for his own ends.

When Lang was released, he petitioned some of his father's students, and his degree was reinstated. In the Autumn diet of examinations that year he gained the *juren* degree, and the following year, the *jinsshi* degree. But he held a bitter grudge in his bones. He prayed night and day at Yan Ruyu's memorial tablet, saying "If your spirit is alive, allow me to get a post in Fujian." Consequently, he was indeed made inspector in Fujian. After holding the post for three months, he investigated some of Shi's misdeeds, and confiscated all his household and possessions. At that time his cousin was chief legislator, so he was able to take Shi's favourite concubine, on pretext of procuring a maid for the government office. As soon as the case was closed, Lang sent in his resignation, and returned home with the concubine.

The Historian of the Strange records: "With all things under heaven: hoarding them incites jealousy and admiring them creates demons; the girl's seductive power was the demon created from his books. This matter had already been fairly bizarre, and there was nothing wrong with the way it was dealt with; but surely the ancestral dragon's brutality was cruel enough! How much more did Shi's secret

ambitions deserve to be avenged in this vile way. Alas! What is so strange about that!"

"The ancestral dragon's brutality" (*zulong zhi nüe* 祖龍之虐) refers to the Qin emperor's burning of the books in 213 BC, ordered to suppress criticism of his rule. The Historian argues that since Shi's book-burning was to fulfil his personal, secret ambition, his crime was even greater, and his punishment was even more justified.

The relationship between true scholarship and immaturity within this tale is typical of the *Liaozhai* collection. At the beginning of the tale, the protagonist exhibits naive and inappropriate behaviour, in his lack of etiquette, his persistent misinterpretation of texts and misreading of contexts. He is entirely unable to adapt the knowledge he has from books, to fit the situations in which he finds himself. He 'grows up' as it were, only after discarding his naive bookishness, and pursuing his official career through the examination system. Naiveté is the essence of the scholar, and is in opposition to worldly success, including success in the provincial and metropolitan level exams. This naiveté can be manifested in attitudes towards sex, towards money, and towards studying itself.

Chapter 6 ~ Folly

One of the defining characteristics of Lang Yuzhu, the naive protagonist of the last tale, is his foolishness (*chi* 痴). This is indicated both by the title of the tale, which refers to him as “The book fool (*shu chi*),” and from the initial description of him as “particularly foolish (尤痴).”³⁹⁰ The concept that bookishness is a kind of folly which implies incompetence in other areas of life is also evident in the tale ‘Mrs Liu’ (劉夫人; 7:06). When Mrs. Liu, a rich woman who does not trust her own sons with her finances, approaches Scholar Lian and asks him to invest her money for him, “The scholar tried to decline, saying that he was young and a book fool (生辭以少年書痴), and afraid he would be a disappointment to her.”³⁹¹

However, the use of the term *chi* is wider in application than simply describing such bookish scholars. While the theme of *chi* in the *Liaozhai* has been discussed by various scholars,³⁹² its specific attributes are often either ignored or prejudiced with modern usages, or else submerged in the discourse on obsession in the late Ming. Although obsession is a crucial theme in much late Ming writing, and the concept of *chi* is undoubtedly closely related to it, I believe a separate analysis of the specific usages of *chi* within the context of the idealisation of childlikeness can add to our understanding of the term.

In orthodox Confucian thought, the infantile state was considered to be one of ignorance (*tongmeng* 童蒙), and even in modern Chinese the phrase *qi meng* (啟蒙), literally

³⁹⁰ PSLQJ p. 395.

³⁹¹ PSLQJ p. 909.

³⁹² See for example Wang Ping 王平, *Liaozhai chuanguo xinli yanjiu* 聊齋創作心理研究[A psychoanalytical study of *Liaozhai* writing] (Jinan: Shandong wenyi cbs, 1991) pp. 6-10; Araki Yagi 八木章好 “*Liaozhai zhiyi de chiren qunxiang: jiqi yu Mingmo Qingchu de sichao guanlian*” 聊齋誌異的痴人群象：及其與明末清初的思潮關聯 [The phenomenon of the *chi ren* in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*: and its relation to trends of thought in the late Ming early Qing] in Gu Meigao 辜美高 and Wang Zhizhong 王枝忠 (eds.), *Guoji Liaozhai Lunwen Ji* 國際聊齋論文集 [An International Collection of Theses on *Liaozhai*] (Beijing: Beijing shifan xueyuan cbs, 1992) pp. 1-6; Ma Jigao 馬積高, *Qingdai xueshu sixiang de bianqian yu wenxue* 清代學術思想的變遷與文學. [Literature and the vicissitudes of academic thought in the Qing Dynasty] (Changsha: Hunan cbs, 1996), pp. 222-227.

“lifting the hood,” is used to describe an infant’s emergence from the dazed new-born state and a step towards learning to relate to the surrounding environment. In what follows, I have undertaken a comprehensive survey of the uses of *chi* in Pu Songling’s writings to explore similar links between childhood and foolishness in Pu’s use of this term.

The Dutch renaissance humanist Erasmus (1466?-1536) famously praised folly, delighting in its childlike qualities: “What else is childhood but silliness and foolishness? Its utter lack of sense is what we find so delightful. Everybody hates a prodigy, detests an old head on young shoulders; witness the oft-repeated saying ‘I hate a small child who’s too wise for his years.’”³⁹³ Lack of sense, coupled with honesty and frank-talking, and a refusal to adjust one’s ideas or opinions according to the situation are the trademarks of the character of Folly Erasmus created: “Whatever the fool has in his mind shows in his face and comes out in his speech, but the wise man has two tongues, as Euripides also says, one to speak the truth with, the other for saying what he thinks fits the occasion.”³⁹⁴

In this chapter, I suggest that the Chinese concept of folly (*chi*) can equally be interpreted as a form of childlikeness, frequently revealing a naïveté and an uncompromising idealism which can be either innate or the result of circumstance. In his doctoral dissertation, Allan Barr cites the sixteenth century tale “The foolish boy and girl” (*chi er nü* 痴兒女) whose author is identified as the “Master of Kua’e studio” (夸娥主人), and which tells of a suicide pact between two lovers. Barr notes that the concluding authorial comment “the foolish person, is the true person” (*chi ren zhe, zhenren ye* 痴人者，真人也) is a direct echo of Li Zhi’s “the childlike mind, is the true mind” (*tongxin zhe, zhenxin ye* 童心者，真心也).³⁹⁵

In the same way, in this chapter I argue that folly is an important aspect of the idealisation of childlikeness in Pu Songling’s writings.

³⁹³ *Praise of Folly*, by Erasmus trans. by Betty Radice, notes by A.H.T. Levi (London; Penguin, 1993) p. 23.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 56.

³⁹⁵ See Barr, “Pu Songling and *Liaozhai zhiyi*”, pp. 219-220.

To facilitate this analysis, I have divided the instances into those which appear in the *Liaozhai* tales, which I discuss in Section A and those which are largely autobiographical, occurring within Pu's collections of poetry and miscellaneous writings, which I consider in Section B. While I do not suggest these two categories are mutually exclusive, they are useful for my discussion here as they reflect the two major strands in this thesis: social disenfranchisement and enforced "adolescence" in Pu Songling's life described in Chapter 2 and themes of childlikeness in his creative writing.

- *Chi* by the late Ming

In the late Ming period, encouraged by the flourishing of the Wang Yangming doctrines, a vogue of unconventionality, introversion and individualism prevailed among the literati. Values systems were readjusted and various previously undesirable or at least unorthodox qualities were now condoned. In conjunction with this, the concepts of folly, *chi*, madness *kuang* 狂 and obsession *pi* 癖 gained new approbation.

While these three concepts are certainly interrelated, they are also distinct. In this chapter, I focus on *chi*, a term which occurs frequently throughout Pu Songling's writings, and suggest that this condition also has childlike attributes.

Studies of late Ming literature have noted a shift in focus onto the detailed portrayal of characters' states of mind. McMahon states: "There is by late Ming, a closer and more deliberate attention to mental states."³⁹⁶ This is of course also in line with the contemporary philosophical interest in the mind, manifest in the revival of the Wang school. References specifically to the mental state of *chi* are particularly numerous in writings by seventeenth and eighteenth-century literati.

One prominent example is Zhang Chao in whose *You meng ying* some of the ambiguity of moral discourse on *chi* is expressed: "You should be greedy for nothing, but if you are

³⁹⁶ Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, p. 6.

buying books you cannot but be greedy. You should not be *chi* in anything, but if you are doing good you cannot but be *chi*.³⁹⁷ While doing anything to an extreme goes against all Confucian teaching on moderation, if you are convinced that something is right, then being *chi* in pursuit of it is a virtue. This is reinforced by Yang Shengzao's 楊聖藻 comment on this line "If you are not *chi* in doing good, you are simply hoping for fame."³⁹⁸ Zhang Dai in his *Taoan Mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 [The Dream Recollections of Taoan] also explores the double meaning of the concept of *chi*, when he fondly reports being ridiculed for his foolishness (*chi*) by a boatman, when he goes walking by the lake at daybreak in the freezing cold, to "look at the snow".³⁹⁹ Stephen Owen has commented on this passage, "To the boatman, going out in the freezing cold is "foolishness" in one sense; Zhang Dai reports the story positively, because to him such "foolishness" is a quality in which he takes pride."⁴⁰⁰

Feng Menglong wrote a series of three anthologies of jokes, entitled *Child's folly* (Tong chi 童痴).⁴⁰¹ Of these the twentieth century critic Hsu Pi-ch'ing has noted: "By reversing the worldly practice of praising the socially sophisticated and successful and looking down upon the socially naive and base, the three collections of *Child's Folly* broke the established rules of the mundane world."⁴⁰²

Two examples from these anthologies, illustrate some aspects of the *chi ren*. The humour in the anecdote entitled "A *chi ren* has a daughter (痴人生女)"⁴⁰³ mocks the protagonist's naiveté and ignorance of the facts of life.

³⁹⁷ Zhang Chao, op.cit., p. 46.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁹⁹ "Looking at the snow from a pagoda in the middle of the lake. (Hu xin ting kan xue 湖心亭看雪)", in *Tao'an Mengyi* (Taipei: Kaiming shudian, 1978), p. 42.

⁴⁰⁰ Stephen Owen, *Anthology* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 818.

⁴⁰¹ These anthologies are also known as the *Hanging Twigs* (guazhi er 掛枝二), *Mountain Songs* (shange 山歌) and the *Treasury of Laughs* (xiaofu 笑府). This last is the most well-known, having been adapted by Youxi Daoren 遊戲道人 (The Playful Daoist) to form the immensely popular *Extensive Gleanings of the Grove of Laughter* (Xiaolin guangji 笑林廣集). Hsu, op.cit, p. 1045.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 1047.

⁴⁰³ *Xiaolin Guangji*, p. 156.

"A *chi ren* got married, but after a long time still did not know how to make love. His wife could not stand it any longer, so held him on top of her and guided him into her, until he was ready to ejaculate. Suddenly he called out "I'm about to wet myself!" She said "Don't worry, just wet yourself inside me." The *chi ren* did as she said. Later she gave birth to a daughter. "Where did that come from?" he asked his wife. She replied "Don't you remember that time you wet yourself?" At that he suddenly became enlightened. Then he felt regret, and rebuked his wife saying "If by wetting yourself you have a daughter, then if you shit yourself you're bound to have a son. Why didn't you say so earlier?"

A second joke from the same anthology, "The foolishly paranoid scholar (*chiyi sheng* 痴疑生),"⁴⁰⁴ satirises a scholar's inappropriate reaction to his environment, and his inability to distinguish fact from fiction, what he reads in books from the reality around him.

"A *xiuca*i scholar was *chi* and paranoid. Once during the night he hid in a dark corner. When his wife walked past he suddenly rushed out and embraced her. In fright, she cursed him loudly. The *xiuca*i was delighted, proclaiming: "My household has produced a chaste wife." When he read history books, whenever he came upon any injustice in them, he would gnash his teeth and hit the table. One day, he was reading "Qin Chang murders Yue Wumu" and started to become extremely angry. He kept on hitting the table and cursing loudly. His wife tried to restrain him saying "We only have ten tables in this house, and you've already broken eight of them. Why not leave this table for us to have dinner off?" The *xiuca*i shouted angrily at her "You're doubtless having an affair with Qin Chang yourself!" At this he beat his wife severely. She was at a loss as to the reason."

From these two anecdotes we can deduce that *chi ren* in the late Ming evoked images of naiveté or ignorance, particularly of a sexual kind, an inability to make non-literal interpretations, or even to distinguish fact from fiction, and a severe inadequacy in relating to one's surroundings.

- Critical discourse on *chi* in the *Liaozhai*

Judith Zeitlin outlines the history of the discourse on obsession as a literary and philosophical phenomenon, which can be traced back to the fifth century compilation

⁴⁰⁴ Xiaolin Guangji, p. 502.

entitled *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語). She chronicles the debate on the nature of obsession between the three Song writers Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-c.1151). Her conclusions on the nature of obsession specific to the late Ming are a useful indicator of the extent to which the individualist philosophy of the leftist Wang Yangming school were reflected in social attitudes to this personality trait:-

“The eleventh-century intellectuals had already argued that obsessions were valuable as an outlet for personal fulfillment; in the sixteenth century, obsession as a vehicle for self-expression becomes the dominant mode.... Most important, the virtue of an obsession lay not in the object of devotion, not even in the act of devotion, but in self-realization.... Obsession is no longer understood as a form of alterity, but as a self-reflexive act: it is not the self loving the other, but the self loving the self.”⁴⁰⁵

Zeitlin examines eleven tales in support of her argument on obsession in the anthology and, while *pi* is a feature of many of these, *chi* is an equally important theme.⁴⁰⁶ There are evidently strong connections between the two terms, and both received similar approbation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The preface to the sixteenth century *A Brief History of Obsession and Lunacy* (*Pi dian xiao shi* 癖顛小史) links the concepts specifically suggesting folly and madness (*kuang*) are symptoms of *pi*: “The signs of obsession resemble folly and madness.”⁴⁰⁷

However, although several of the *Liaozhai* stories do show an obsessive collector for whom the object of his desire is a pathological *pi* such as Zeitlin describes, the word *pi* is rarely used, and a major thrust of the description is to describe the *chi* of the protagonist. If we take the tale Huang Ying (黃英; 7:34) for example, the protagonist Ma 馬 is certainly an obsessive collector of chrysanthemums. However, the plot concerns his

⁴⁰⁵ Zeitlin, *Historian*, p.70.

⁴⁰⁶ The main tales Zeitlin refers to in this chapter are: “The Book Fool” (Shuchi 書痴; 7:35); Huang Jiulang (黃九郎; 2:29); A Bao (啊宝; 2:06); “Alcoholic” (Jiukuang 酒狂; 3:56); “The chess devil” (Qi gui 棋鬼; 3:40); Renxiu (任秀; 7:39); “The gambling charm” (Du fu 賭符; 3:09); Huang Ying (黃英; 7:34); “Crickets” (Cu zhi 促織; 3:25); “The strangeness of pigeons” (Ge yi 鴿異; 5:05); and Shi Qingxu (石清虛; 8:30).

⁴⁰⁷ Cited and translated in Zeitlin’s “The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature” *LIC* Vol. 12, no. 1, (June 1991) p. 8.

friendship with another chrysanthemum lover, Tao 陶. Tao is equally obsessive in his collecting habits, and is a true connoisseur. When they hit hard times, though, it is Tao who wants to sell the flowers to support themselves, whereas Ma is foolish in his desire to keep them, and is affronted by Tao's mercenary attitude. I therefore believe that, despite being intimately related to the discourse on *pi*, the distinct characteristics of *chi* should not be overlooked. It is possible to have an obsession, like Tao, but still have a degree of worldly wisdom. Ma's obsession is combined with a naiveté and idealism which renders him unable to accept some of the harsh realities of life. It may therefore prove useful to examine the concept of *chi* in isolation from these broader ideological trends.

In his study of *chi*, Araki Yagi of Keio University mentions that the term appears twenty-four times in Pu Songling's *shi* and *ci* poems,⁴⁰⁸ but his main analysis concerns the tales themselves.⁴⁰⁹ While Yagi relates his analysis to other contemporary writers, he also locates the term mainly within the discourse on *pi*. Yagi states *chi* as used by Pu Songling "indicates a lack of diplomacy, and a biased outlook; in traditional orthodox morality it was either seen as a stupidity caused by incurable infatuation or else as an unacceptable tendency to lose oneself in trifles."⁴¹⁰ Xu Wenjun 徐文軍 has also written a short article on the concept of *chi* in the *Liaozhai*, in which he defines *chi* as "following one's own path and not caring what others think."⁴¹¹ Ma Jigao notes that Pu Songling's attitude to *chi* is not as extreme as that of some of the Wang Yangming school extremists, since while he generally condoned it, "he had some reservations" and did not approve of excesses such as alcoholism, gambling and debauchery.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ As will become apparent, I believe this is a slight miscalculation, but since Prof Yagi does not state which edition of the poetry anthologies he is using, an earlier edition may well only have a total of 24 references.

⁴⁰⁹ Araki Yagi, op.cit. pp. 1-6.

⁴¹⁰ Yagi, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴¹¹ This definition forms the conclusion to a (to my knowledge unpublished) paper entitled "*Liaozhai chi shuo*" 聊齋痴說 [On *chi* in the *Liaozhai*] prepared for the Second International Conference on *Liaozhai* studies, Zibo, 2001.

⁴¹² Ma Jigao, op cit. p. 224.

In this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that *chi* is closely linked to ideas of childlikeness, naive sincerity and idealism this thesis has been addressing. Traditional uses of *chi* included references to being genuine. Bian He 卞和, of the Zhou Dynasty, who persistently tried to present a succession of kings with a piece of pure jade, inside a rough stone, was known as “The Fool of Lingyang” 陵陽痴子. The first two kings believed he was trying to deceive them with fake jade and ordered his feet cut off as punishment. Only the third king ordered the stone to be cut open, and discovered the priceless jade inside. Foolish in the eyes of the world, for his persistence in a self-defeating mission, his sincerity and integrity are eventually acknowledged. This story is alluded to by Pu Songling in the *Historian of the Strange’s* comment at the end of “The Rakshas and the Sea-market” (羅刹海市; 3:20) when he laments the hypocrisy of the world, wondering who the Fool of Lingyang could turn to now.⁴¹³

- Definitions

Before looking at the uses of *chi* in the primary sources, is it useful to survey briefly some of the definitions of the term found in standard reference books.

The term 痴 has connotations both of foolishness and of naiveté. While the Han dynasty *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 defines *chi* as “not intelligent” (*bu hui* 不慧), the twentieth century *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 and the *Hanyu da zidian* 漢語大字典 both list seven definitions for the character, the *Ciyuan* 詞源 lists three. I will use the most comprehensive of these and go through the six main explanations individually.⁴¹⁴

The first definition of *chi* in the *Hanyu da cidian* is a lack of intelligence, (*bu conghui* 不聰慧) or stupidity (*yuben* 愚笨) as in the meaning given in the *Shuowen*. This seems to be the most common early definition, where *chi* is contrasted with wisdom. Cited examples include the Han dynasty work by Mou Rong 牟融 (b. c.170 AD), *On the delusion of principles* (理惑論) in which it is stated: “The sage said: those who eat grain

⁴¹³ PSLQJ p. 312.

⁴¹⁴ I have ignored the seventh case in which the character is used simply as a homophonic alternative to another character meaning a type of wine vessel.

are wise (*zhi* 智); those who eat grass are foolish (*chi*).” The composition of the two versions of the graph for this character may also suggest this is an early consideration, as a combination of the illness radical and either ‘to doubt’ 疑, or ‘to know’ 知. There are also many examples of bisyllabic combinations in modern Chinese, such as *chiyu* (痴愚), *chidai* (痴呆), *chiben* (痴笨) etc., all of which are practically synonymous and imply a kind of dull stupidity.

The second definition is “madness” (顛狂), even to the extent of being comatose (神志不清). Wang Chong 王充 (27-97), in his *Balanced Treatise* (*Lun heng* 論衡) states that those suffering from this kind of illness (*chi kuang zhi ji* 痴狂之疾) “sing while walking along the road, cannot tell east from west, do not notice if they are dry or wet, do not feel any illness, do not know if they are hungry or thirsty; their personality has already been damaged.”⁴¹⁵ *Kuang* 狂, usually translated as mad or unrestrained, and used in a generally derogatory tone when referring to so-called “wild Chan” (*kuang chan* 狂禪) philosophers like Li Zhi, was used by Confucius in a positive way to describe those earnestly seeking the way but also in a negative way when it is not accompanied by learning.

The third is a result of becoming so engrossed in a particular object that you lose your direction, or sense of proportion (迷戀 or 入迷). This is the meaning most relevant to the idea of “infatuation” (*qingchi* 情痴) first mentioned in the *Shi shuo xin yu*,⁴¹⁶ and common in late Ming fictional works. This definition also provides the closest link to the discourse on obsession. However, obsession requires an object, whereas ‘folly’ is broader in application and refers to the state of mind which can then produce a range of behaviours, including obsession.

The fourth meaning, “dazed”, or “stupefied” (呆滯 or 不靈活) can be linked to this sense of a loss of direction, as in the compound *chimi* (痴迷), meaning “lost in a daze”.

⁴¹⁵ Wang Chong 王充, *Lun heng* 論衡 [Balanced Treatise], Yang Baozhong 楊寶忠 (annot) (Hebei: Hebei jiaoyu cbs, 1999), “Shuai xing pian” 率性篇, p. 57.

⁴¹⁶ *Shi shuo xin yu* appendix 1 chapter 34, no. 4, p. 694.

The fifth meaning is linked intimately with youth or infancy, occurring in combinations such as *chixiao* (痴小\ literally “young and foolish”) and suggests naiveté, or innocence (幼稚 or 天真). This association is so common that compounds such as 痴兒 or 痴女, (literally “foolish son,” or “foolish daughter”) can sometimes be taken simply as alternatives to son or daughter.

The last usage given is as a Buddhist term, a translation of the Sanskrit *moha*, which can alternatively be rendered “without clarity” (*wu ming* 無明). In the Buddhist scriptures, *chi*, translated by Soothill as ‘stupidity, ignorance, unintelligence or unwillingness to accept Buddha-truth’⁴¹⁷ is one of the three poisons (alternately known as the three ailments, the three roots, or the three pearls) alongside lust, or wrongful desire, and hatred or anger. It also means to be “misled by appearances, taking the seeming for real.” In the same way, in Buddhist terminology, a *chixin* is “an unenlightened mind” and *chimi* is “unenlightened and led astray”.⁴¹⁸

Section A ~ *Chi* in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*

The importance of the term *chi* in the *Liaozhai* is evident from the fact it is used a total of ninety-three times in the tales themselves.⁴¹⁹ In Pu’s other fictional works, namely the fifteen *liqu* which make up his *Anthology of Rustic Plays* (*liqu quanji*), *chi* is used a further twenty-one times.⁴²⁰ In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate the childlike aspects of this ‘folly’, by a comprehensive survey of these usages of the term *chi*.

⁴¹⁷ William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Delhi; Motilal Banarsidass, 1997 reprint), p. 69.

⁴¹⁸ Soothill, op.cit., p. 408.

⁴¹⁹ I am not including in this figure the character’s appearance in the name of the protagonist Xu Dongchi 徐東痴 in “The Dragon who fetched water” (龍取水; 3:38).

⁴²⁰ This is the total number of occurrences, except for the recurrent use of the term in the name “Xiaochi” in the play *Penglai banquet*. For reasons of space and to avoid unnecessary repetition, I have listed these in Appendix 2. The twenty-one examples of the term are similar in usage to those found in the *Liaozhai* tales.

- The ten categories of folly

In the appendix to the story of A Bao (discussed below) (阿宝附則) Pu Songling lists what he describes as “The ten categories of folly (集痴十類)”. In each of the examples given, there is an imbalance between the internal and the external, the ideals of the self and the compromises engendered by the reality of dealing with others. The initial state results in inappropriate action. The ten varieties of *chi* Pu Songling lists are:

“Storing your wealth in the cellar while eating poorly;
Continually praising your son’s intelligence to guests;
Loving your son but being unable to tell him to study;
Concealing your illness for fear of others’ knowing;
Paying out money for others to spend licentiously;
Secretly going to drinking meetings to get others to gamble;
Soliciting others to write essays for you to deceive your own father and brothers;
Splitting bills and finances between father and son too clearly;
Using tricks and cunning within your own family;
Being pleased when your sons or pupils excel at gambling.”⁴²¹

- the folly of the naive protagonists

Several of the naive protagonists who were the subject of the previous chapter, are described as *chi*. In addition to the folly of bookishness, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the term *chi* is used in the portrayal of other types of naiveté and childlikeness in the *Liaozhai*.

In the tale “Yingning” (嬰寧; 1:48) the term *chi* is mentioned a total of seven times and is an important aspect of the characters of both the eponymous heroine and her future husband Wang Zifu.⁴²² When she is first introduced to Wang she is described by her foster-mother as “already sixteen years of age, but still as foolish as an infant. 年已十六，呆痴裁如嬰兒。”⁴²³ When she persistently misinterprets Wang’s attentions,

⁴²¹ PSLQJ p. 197.

⁴²² A full summary of the plot of this tale was included in the last chapter.

⁴²³ PSLQJ p. 93.

he becomes impatient at her misunderstanding, wondering, “are you really so foolish? 妹子痴耶?”⁴²⁴ but she replies “What’s foolish about that? 何便是痴?”⁴²⁵ Wang “hates her foolishness yet has no way to enlighten her 生恨其痴無術可以悟之.”⁴²⁶ After they get married, he’s afraid that because of her foolish naiveté (憨痴)⁴²⁷ she’ll tell others about the secrets of their sex life, but she does not. In contrast to Yingning, where *chi* describes her naive ignorance, Wang himself is also described as *chi* on two occasions, the first by his cousin Wu 吳, when Wang has just fallen in love at his first sight of Yingning. Wu says Wang is foolish (君意亦痴)⁴²⁸ for becoming so distressed and not trying to do anything about it. When Wang heads off to look for her, knowing neither her name nor where she lives but meets her foster-mother by chance, Wu remarks “I can tell you’re simply a book fool 書痴!” Wang’s *chi*, then, manifests itself as foolish intent, being so focused on his ideal of what he wants that he forgets the reality of how to go about achieving it.

As a young child, Yuanfeng is described as “completely *chi*” (絕痴)⁴²⁹ demonstrated by the fact that “at sixteen years of age he still could not distinguish male from female, and for this reason no-one from the county would marry him.” His *chi* is referred to a total of six times in the tale of his life with Xiao Cui (小翠; 5:46).⁴³⁰ After their marriage, when they spend days on end playing together like children, dressing up and playing tricks on the household, they are described as “that crazy wife and foolish boy 顛婦痴兒”.⁴³¹ They sleep in separate beds, and have no sexual relations. After suffocating Yuanfeng with a quilt in a scalding bath, Xiao Cui defends her actions to his parents by saying “It’s better to have no son, than to have one as foolish as this 如此痴兒不如無有”.⁴³² After he

⁴²⁴ PSLQJ p. 93.

⁴²⁵ PSLQJ p. 93.

⁴²⁶ PSLQJ p. 94.

⁴²⁷ PSLQJ p. 95.

⁴²⁸ PSLQJ p.91.

⁴²⁹ PSLQJ p. 62.

⁴³⁰ The plot of this story is also summarised in the previous chapter.

⁴³¹ PSLQJ p. 63.

⁴³² PSLQJ p. 64.

revives, he has lost his foolishness, and, from this point on, the couple sleep together and have normal sexual relations.

An exploration of the double-meaning of *chi* is documented in the story “Abao” (阿宝; 2:06). The eponymous heroine is depicted as a chaste woman, initially apparently impervious to the affection of the naive hero, Sun Zichu 孫子楚. Sun is nicknamed “Sun the fool” Sun chi 孫痴⁴³³ and he is often ridiculed for his naiveté and awkwardness, particularly around women. After he catches a glimpse of the beautiful Abao, Sun “remained standing, dazed (痴立) in the same place; when called he did not answer.”⁴³⁴ The detail of the characterisation concerns the ineptitude of the male in dealing with women, his clumsiness signified by an extra finger. Abao requires him to amputate his extra finger as a proof of the sincerity of his affection. He complies with this request, and she then teasingly asks him to now “get rid of his foolishness 去其痴.”⁴³⁵ His infatuation with her is evidenced by his ability to reach her, first by separating his soul from his body and meeting her in a dream, and then by metamorphosing into a parrot and flying to her. Through his perseverance, she is eventually won over and they marry and live together, despite her parents’ objections. Abao manages the finances, since “he was a book fool, and did not understand how manage household affairs 生痴于書，不知理家人生業.”⁴³⁶ The sincerity of Abao’s affection is underlined when, later in the story, Sun revives as a result of the depth of Abao’s grief and loyalty.

The story ends with the narrative comment:-

“If someone is foolish by nature then they must be focussed 性痴則其志凝, and so book-fools are good at writing, art-fools are skilled in their techniques. The real wasters are all those who declare themselves to be free of folly..... How can Sun Zichu be considered foolish?”⁴³⁷

⁴³³ PSLQJ p. 195.

⁴³⁴ PSLQJ p. 195.

⁴³⁵ PSLQJ p. 195.

⁴³⁶ PSLQJ p. 197.

⁴³⁷ PSLQJ p. 197.

Appended to this tale are two commentaries. The first, by the Qing dynasty annotator He Yin 何垠 comments that Sun Zichu's *chi* "really is just honest simplicity (*zhen shi chengpu* 真是誠樸). When Abao tells him to get rid of his *chi*, she is actually testing this sincerity."⁴³⁸

The second, by the well-known eighteenth-century commentator Dan Minglun, suggests that while *chi* in certain circumstances simply produces excessively foolish behaviour, the sincerity and genuineness that go with it are things the world could do with more of:

"Cutting off his finger in response to something said in jest, that is truly *chi*..... We often talk about the correct behaviour for an official, a son, a younger brother, or a friend. Surely if they could all be dealt with with a sincere mind (*yi zhi cheng zhi xin chu zhi* 以至誠之心處之), the world would no longer have any problems. Far too little attention has been paid to *chi* (*chi gu ke shao hu* 痴顧可少乎)!"⁴³⁹

It is noteworthy that in these three examples the protagonists are all cured of their foolishness, as the plot develops. The state of *chi* is depicted in these tales as an obstacle which must be overcome if the protagonist is to discard his childish idealism and function effectively in society. They describe a feature common to many tales in the *Liaozhai*, that of a naive protagonist attempting and usually failing to come to terms with the external reality of his or her situation. *Chi* is only one aspect of this naiveté. Karl S. Kao suggests that those tales which deal with a 'social theme' often concern the conflict between the world view of the protagonist and the rest of society: "The two sets of values (internal and external or the individual's and society's) are at odds with each other. When the individual affected by the changing values and ways refuses to adjust to the new reality, injustice is felt. The question is a matter of perspective and the enigmatic transformations and the turns of events in these tales may have to do with the difficulties of such adjustments."⁴⁴⁰ While it is not always possible to find a single interpretation of *chi*

⁴³⁸ LZZY p. 347.

⁴³⁹ LZZY p. 347.

⁴⁴⁰ Karl S.Y.Kao, op.cit, p. 220.

consistently applicable throughout his writings the fact that Pu Songling went to such pains to define this concept underlies its importance in his writings.

In what follows, I will briefly survey the other usages of *chi* in the *Liaozhai*.⁴⁴¹ These are, perhaps, less obviously connected with childlikeness. However, I would argue that they all imply a state of idealism, social dysfunction, or inability to relate to society, which is also reminiscent of a child who has not yet fully established himself as an adult (*cheng ren*). Some instances stress simple-mindedness, such as when Zhu'er (珠兒; 1:59) is described as "robust and loveable, but completely foolish in nature (魁梧可愛然性絕痴)," evidenced by the fact that "even at the age of five or six she still could not differentiate beans from wheat,"⁴⁴² and her speech was clumsy."⁴⁴³ The term can be used as a form of ridicule, or mild abuse, either as a modifier to a noun, or with the inference of a second or third person object. It can be used for male or female alike. In the vast majority of these instances, the term is used positively and sometimes appears simply to be an affectionate term of address.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, it is very frequently used to denote the subject being unable to deal with a certain reality, either being financially incompetent, or else, more commonly, being overly idealistic and simplistic about love. The *Liaozhai* tales also provide examples in which the nature of folly itself is discussed, raising questions of what type of behaviour is considered foolish, and what is not. Here it is difficult to distinguish the values of the author, the narrative voice, the Historian of the Strange, and the fictional characters.

⁴⁴¹ All references and volume numbers of the tales refer to the Ren Duxing 任篤行 edition of the *Liaozhai*. For consistency in this chapter, however, and for ease of reference, in the following footnotes I have also included page references to the 1998 *Pu Songling quanji*.

⁴⁴² This is a common cliché, suggesting two things which should be easily distinguishable.

⁴⁴³ PSLQJ p. 147

⁴⁴⁴ Examples include Hua Guzi (花姑子; 4:11) twice teasingly calling her benefactor and lover An Youyu 安幼與 "you foolish fellow" (痴郎 and 痴郎子) (PSLQJ p.520) or the scholar calling his wife "you silly woman" (痴婆子) (PSLQJ p. 747) for chopping up some vegetables they had used as a sexual aid and serving them up with the water caltrops to serve their guests, before both of them laughing about the situation (狐慳淫; 5:08).

- Idealism

Many uses of the term *chi* imply an extreme idealism, which refuses to compromise with reality. In this sense, the folly is one of believing something too strongly, against social convention, or common sense. Frequently, but not always, the belief is connected with romance. In the next section, I will look at the uses of *chi* to describe infatuation, where the emphasis is on a kind of emotional paralysis resulting from such love. First, I will consider those examples which emphasise the idealist and irrational folly of persistent devotion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, or integrity in the face of ridicule, poverty, or even death.

Magistrate Lu's daughter (魯公女; 2:20) is ridiculed as a silly girl (痴婢)⁴⁴⁵ for steadfastly refusing all suitors, in order to fulfil the promise she had made to Zhang, a benefactor from her previous life. When Liancheng's father (連城; 2:40) asks the rich salt baron who is engaged to her to provide some of his own flesh to make medicine to cure her, he laughs at this impractical request, calling him a "foolish old man" (痴老翁).⁴⁴⁶ In the same tale, when her friend wants to stay with her rather than return to her own home, Liancheng ridicules her affectionately (卿大痴矣).⁴⁴⁷ The closing comment to this story by the Historian of the Strange, is "Most people would consider it foolish to be willing to pledge one's very life after knowing only a smile (一笑之知，許之以身，世人或議其痴)." ⁴⁴⁸ Lianxiang (蓮香; 2:05) calls Li foolish (痴哉!) ⁴⁴⁹ for having sex every night with a ghost, despite the obvious harm that this would do him. The mistress of the house teases her maid Qingmei (青梅; 3:19) and calls her a "silly bint" (痴婢)⁴⁵⁰ when she declares her intention to choose her own marriage partner, a poor but very filial scholar named Zhang. A lotus spirit in the tale "Hehua sanniangzi" (荷花三娘子; 4:25) calls Zong Xiangruo 宗湘若 a "foolish scholar" (痴生)⁴⁵¹ when he wants to be intimate

⁴⁴⁵ PSLQJ p. 223.

⁴⁴⁶ PSLQJ p. 258.

⁴⁴⁷ PSLQJ p. 259.

⁴⁴⁸ PSLQJ p. 260.

⁴⁴⁹ PSLQJ p. 191.

⁴⁵⁰ PSLQJ p. 304.

⁴⁵¹ PSLQJ p. 547.

with her in spite of the dangers it may bring him. In “Gong the Immortal” (鞏仙; 5:16) the King of Lu 魯王 laughs at “you foolish scholar” (痴哉書生)⁴⁵² for choosing to marry his long-term fiancée rather than a younger beauty.

Scholar Zhou’s father-in-law is a bandit who is captured by the imperial army and both he and his wife are executed. Zhou’s wife, while looking for a way to have them both buried together, regrets the fact that her mother died because her “foolish father (痴父)”⁴⁵³ wouldn’t compromise his principles and take the advice of others (柳生; 5:39). When Chang’e’s (嫦娥; 6:10) husband Zong Zimei’s 宗子美 soul leaves his body in desperation at the thought of her leaving him, she shouts at him “Foolish fellow (痴郎痴郎)! I’m here”⁴⁵⁴ and he revives as if waking up from a dream. Just as Shen (申氏; 7:31) is about to commit suicide because he is unable to provide for his family, his father discovers him and calls out “You foolish boy! (痴兒)”⁴⁵⁵ How can it have come to this?” The frog god (青蛙神; 7:37) calls his daughter a “silly bint” (痴婢)⁴⁵⁶ when she disobeys his orders to leave her aggressive husband and remarry. The matchmaker laughs at Scholar Ji (寄生; 8:50) calling him a “foolish lord” (痴公子)⁴⁵⁷ when he becomes gravely ill on hearing that his sweetheart is already betrothed to someone else. Finally, the matchmaker teases Ji again, asking isn’t it quite foolish (不已痴乎)⁴⁵⁸ to refuse to contemplate the prospect of any woman other than the one he is pining after being able to cure his broken heart. The young boy Huo Huan in the tale “Qing’E” (青娥; 5:27) displays many aspects of foolish naiveté, as he burrows through walls with a spade, in order to reach the object of his childish crush, but the only specific mention of the term is in the Historian’s comment at the end of the story: “Digging holes in order to share a sleeping mat, is a foolish idea (其意則痴); trowelling through walls and cursing old men, is crazy behaviour (其行則狂).”⁴⁵⁹ When Liu Zigu 劉子固’s mother finally meets her

⁴⁵² PSLQJ p. 699.

⁴⁵³ PSLQJ p. 665.

⁴⁵⁴ PSLQJ p. 341.

⁴⁵⁵ PSLQJ p. 787.

⁴⁵⁶ PSLQJ p. 404.

⁴⁵⁷ PSLQJ p. 822.

⁴⁵⁸ PSLQJ p. 821.

⁴⁵⁹ PSLQJ p. 620.

son's beloved A Xiu (阿綉; 5:44), and really likes her, she exclaims, "No wonder our foolish boy (痴兒) couldn't stop dreaming about you!"⁴⁶⁰ Xiaoxie (小謝; 4:51) teases scholar Tao 陶生 "you foolish fellow" (痴郎)⁴⁶¹ for asking her questions about her family background, before they had even become lovers. Towards the end of the tale, the Daoist also laughs at him when Tao persistently begs him for help to find Xiaoxie a human body to be reborn into "how persistent you are, you foolish scholar" (痴生好纏人)⁴⁶², but he promises to do all he can. After Jin Shengse's (金生色; 4:32) death, his mother-in-law urges her daughter to remarry as soon as possible, rather than spend all her time looking after her infant son, saying "surely anyone who did that would be a fool (寧非痴子)."⁴⁶³ When the young Aduan 阿端 has had no news of his beloved Wanxia (晚霞; 7:41) for several months he "became as a fool, and wanted to die (痴想欲絕)."⁴⁶⁴

These examples all depict an idealism which arouses incomprehension or gentle ridicule in onlookers. It implies a total lack of compromise and refusal to conform to social norms and expectations regarding marriage or career success. It is a state of mind which, while rarely condemned harshly by others, is nevertheless deemed socially inappropriate.

- Emotional paralysis

The second category, which partially overlaps with the first, is the use of *chi* to indicate an extreme emotion which renders a person paralysed. The emphasis here is on the extent to which the emotion is felt. Excessive attachment to a person or object is, of course, a common trope in the late Ming and *chi* is certainly connected with this discourse on obsession. This usage of *chi* is the most relevant to that discussion. I suggest that the definition of the term should not be limited to this, however, and can also be seen as an aspect of naiveté and idealism which pervades Pu Songling's writings.

⁴⁶⁰ PSLQJ p. 676.

⁴⁶¹ PSLQJ p. 708.

⁴⁶² PSLQJ p. 710.

⁴⁶³ PSLQJ p. 554.

⁴⁶⁴ PSLQJ p. 410.

When the shy scholar Liu Zhongkan 劉仲堪 is entirely bewildered by a visit from Empress Zhen (5:42), she explains she is repaying a debt of gratitude for his foolish love (以報情痴)⁴⁶⁵ in a previous life, when he had been willingly punished for something on her account. The fox spirit known as the spinning girl (績女; 6:59) is upset when her friend agrees to let a local man have a glimpse of her in return for a large sum of money: “You were just greedy for his bribes, but I can sense his infatuation 汝貪其賂我感其痴); he can have a glimpse of me, but our time together is over.”⁴⁶⁶ The fox spirit Shunhua 舜華, when she discovers that her lover Zhang Hongjian (張鴻漸; 6:62) values his wife’s love over hers declares somewhat unconvincingly: “It seems that loving someone with foolish emotion, in the end is pointless (痴情戀人終無意味).”⁴⁶⁷ The courtesan Ruiyun (瑞雲; 7:24) is propositioned by a penniless scholar, who says “I have only the foolishness of my emotions (情痴) that I can give to you, my true soulmate.”⁴⁶⁸ In the second of the stories titled “Wu tong” (五通; 7:29), Scholar Jin 金生 suspects his lover is an immortal. She retorts that when he’s so lonely, having someone as foolish in her emotions (痴情人)⁴⁶⁹ as she is can hardly be a bad thing.

When Scholar Huang 黃生 asks his new-found lover the peony spirit Xiangyu (香玉; 8:22) to bring along her friend Jiangxue 絳雪 next time they meet, she replies “sister Jiang is much more of a loner, she isn’t as foolishly sentimental as me (不似妾情痴也).”⁴⁷⁰ The female lover of the lord of Jiaping (嘉平公子; 8:32) declares herself similarly afflicted when she comes to meet him one evening in the pouring rain. On arrival she takes off her muddy boots and tells him to clean them for her. He does as she says, and then discovers that they are a fine pair of exquisitely embroidered shoes. She then explains her actions are to prove the depth of her feelings for him: “I would not have dared order you to deal with these dirty things, but I wish to let my lord know the

⁴⁶⁵ PSLQJ p. 669.

⁴⁶⁶ PSLQJ p. 877.

⁴⁶⁷ PSLQJ p. 881.

⁴⁶⁸ PSLQJ p. 607.

⁴⁶⁹ PSLQJ p. 921.

⁴⁷⁰ PSLQJ p. 449.

foolish extent of my love (妾之痴于情也).”⁴⁷¹ The Historian of the Strange comments on the tale Scholar Ji (寄生; 8:50) “The father was a fool for love (父痴於情), and then the son also very nearly died for love.”⁴⁷² The Historian of the Strange’s comment to the tale of Shi Qingxu’s (石清虛; 8:30) obsessive relationship with a rock begins, in Zeitlin’s translation, “Unearthly beauty in a thing makes it the site of calamity. In this man’s desire to sacrifice his life for the rock, wasn’t his folly extreme! (亦痴甚矣)”⁴⁷³

This emotional paralysis can also affect the cognitive functions. There are several examples where the protagonist’s foolish fixation on his lover renders him unable to think freely. After Empress Zhen (甄后; 5:42) leaves, Liu Zhongkan cannot stop thinking about her, and “his thoughts became fixated as if he were a fool (凝思若痴)”⁴⁷⁴ When Liu Zigu is told that his beloved A Xiu (5:44) has become engaged to somebody else, he weeps continually, “wandering backwards and forwards, foolishly missing her (徘徊痴念).”⁴⁷⁵ When Wang Guian (王桂庵; 8:49) missed his chance to arrange a match with a beauty he had fallen in love with, he “felt totally dejected, sitting foolishly with his thoughts fixated (痴坐凝思).”⁴⁷⁶

In these cases, the intensity of the love or infatuation the characters feel is described in terms of a kind of paralysis in which the subject is unable to function normally, or think of anything else. It is obviously close to an obsession (*pi*), but the emphasis here is on the mental state of the subject, rather than a “pathological blockage” caused by the object of desire.⁴⁷⁷ The extreme degree of emotion has rendered the subject foolish.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷¹ PSLQJ p. 462.

⁴⁷² PSLQJ p. 823.

⁴⁷³ PSLQJ p. 465; Zeitlin translates this story in full, in *Historian*, pp. 203-207, and takes it as the basis for her excellent analysis of obsession in the *Liaozhai*.

⁴⁷⁴ PSLQJ p. 670.

⁴⁷⁵ PSLQJ p. 675.

⁴⁷⁶ PSLQJ p. 818.

⁴⁷⁷ See Zeitlin, pp. 61-74 for an analysis of the meaning of *pi* as an obstruction.

⁴⁷⁸ The weakness of this state is also clear from another example, in which the Daoist nun Chen Yunqi (陳雲栖; 8:06) is described as “foolish and delicate and unable to endure hardship (嬌痴不能作苦).” PSLQJ p.423.

- Financial incompetence

In the last chapter, I suggested that many of the naive protagonists were characterised by a complete lack of business sense. The term *chi* is also sometimes used in this context in the stories. In the tale Wang Cheng (王成; 1:38) Wang laughs at Cheng, calling him a foolish lad (痴男子)⁴⁷⁹ because of what Wang sees as his financial incompetence. Xiliu (細柳; 5:52), a very intelligent woman who wishes to overcome fate, and wants to put off getting married for as long as possible eventually decides to get married to please her parents. Her efficient management skills at running the household are superior to her husband's, but when a tax collector comes to the door she discovers she has to call her husband to help get rid of him. Her husband then teases her saying, "So only now you realise that a clever woman is still no match for a stupid man (慧女不若痴男)?"⁴⁸⁰ Chen steals his father's money to help pay the tuition fees for his impoverished but very diligent classmate, Scholar Chu (褚生; 6:12). When his father discovers the money is missing, Chen tells him the truth. His father thinks this was a stupid thing to do (以為痴),⁴⁸¹ and so tells Chen to give up his studies. When Gao Yucheng 高玉成 tells his servants to buy meat and wine for a beggar he is looking after, (丐仙; 6:41) "Everyone laughed at the master for being so foolish (共笑主人痴)."⁴⁸² Two very similar references are made to the folly of saving money for your descendants.⁴⁸³

From these instances, then, *chi* can be characterised by a naive generosity which does not look out for self-interest, an obsessive belief or reaction to something, or a lack of financial sense. It is noteworthy that people can be *chi* for being too generous with

⁴⁷⁹ PSLQJ p. 109.

⁴⁸⁰ PSLQJ p. 685.

⁴⁸¹ PSLQJ p. 346.

⁴⁸² PSLQJ p. 946.

⁴⁸³ The Historian comments at the end of "The dead Buddhist monk" (死僧; 5:22), a tale in which the ghost of a monk is witnessed, covered in blood, hiding his money in a Buddhist statue: "As for those people who scrape and save to store up their money, to pass on after their death to descendants about whom they know nothing: that is already foolish enough (亦已痴矣), to say nothing about this monk who didn't even have any descendants!" (PSLQJ p.609). Similarly, he comments at the end of "Empress Zhen" (5:42) that the dog who tried to attack Liu's wife because of events from a former reincarnation, ought to realise the foolishness of making arrangements for your household when at death's door (應大悟分香賣履之痴) and see the pointlessness of still being jealous of a woman who has long since died. (PSLQJ p. 671).

money, or on the contrary, too miserly. It seems the inability to deal with money appropriately is common to both types of individual, and is why they are each described as foolish.

- Silence or immobility

In a description of eccentrics in the teaching profession, the total introversion of one instructor (司訓; 8:09) is vividly portrayed: “He was crazy and foolish by nature (性顛痴), and whenever he was in a social setting, he would fall silent; after sitting for a while, his five senses would begin to awake and he would laugh and cry simultaneously, as if there were no-one else there. If he heard anyone laughing, he would stop immediately.”⁴⁸⁴ The instructor appears to have become entirely self-absorbed, like a kind of self-hypnosis but, when interrupted by something from the external world, he is jolted out of this state. This seems to me to encapsulate the next category of folly, of a condition which results in physical dysfunction. In what follows I have listed those usages of *chi* which suggest some kind of paralysis, either an inability to speak, to hear, to move, or even to breathe.

When entranced by Jiaona (嬌娜; 1:22), the scholar and tutor Kong Xueli 孔雪笠 “from this moment put aside his books, and sat, as if in a daze (廢卷痴坐).”⁴⁸⁵ After he fails the exam again, Scholar Ye (葉生; 1:31), generally taken as a parody on Pu Songling himself, is described as “as foolish as a wooden doll (痴如木偶).”⁴⁸⁶ This seems to be a favourite simile with Pu, as he uses variations on it three times in all, in his collected works. In “The merchant’s son” (賈兒; 1:41), when a woman is bewitched by a male fox, her ten year old son tries various means to rid her of her affliction. After he initially succeeds, “his mother lay in a daze, as if she were dead 痴臥如死”.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ PSLQJ p. 419.

⁴⁸⁵ PSLQJ p. 77.

⁴⁸⁶ PSLQJ p. 88.

⁴⁸⁷ PSLQJ p. 123.

The highly competent Xiaoer (小二; 2:45) saves her husband and household when thirteen hoodlums break in to rob them, by sitting up in bed, naked and unashamed: “All were transfixed, with their tongues hanging out, foolish like wooden dolls (痴若木偶).”⁴⁸⁸ Similarly related to immobility is the pairing of *chi* and *fei* 肥. In “Dreaming about foxes” (狐夢; 4:05) a fox spirit teases her fat lover Bi Yian, “You’re so fat and you’re a dead weight on me (肥郎痴重), it’s too much for a person to bear!”⁴⁸⁹ When Wang Wen 王文 sees the beautiful young Yatou (鴉頭; 4:01)⁴⁹⁰ in a brothel and is told she is still a virgin who has so far refused all advances despite being punished for this, he “lowered his head and silently sat as if in a daze (默然痴坐).”⁴⁹¹ After the notorious shrew Jiang Cheng (江成; 5:10) is shown the error of her ways by a Buddhist priest, she “went into her room and sat in a daze (入室痴坐).”⁴⁹²

Dou Xu 竇旭 is invited to a banquet by an official he has never met, who then proposes to give him the hand of his daughter, the Lotus Princess (蓮花公主; 4:22) in marriage. Dou is completely bewildered, and becomes “dejected, as if in a trance (悵然若痴), as if he had heard nothing.” (He later regrets his indecision, and when given another opportunity to marry her, takes it immediately). When her elder sisters ridicule her for marrying a poor orphan scholar, Hu Siniang (胡四娘; 5:36) does not react at all. “When

⁴⁸⁸ PSLQJ pp. 267-8.

⁴⁸⁹ PSLQJ p. 457 These two terms are also combined in another of Pu Songling’s poems about the devastating effect of the unpredictable weather on the lives of the local farmers, he describes the desolation of the land after the prolonged rainstorm of 1683, with only the lush grass flourishing ignorantly (*chi fei* 痴肥).⁴⁸⁹ This link between *chi* and *fei*, and also between *shou* 瘦 and *kuang* 狂, was established in an account in the history of the Southern Dynasties, in which a drunken Shen Zhaolüe 沈昭略 meets Wang Yue 王約, son of Wang Jingwen 王景文 and mocks him “Why are you so fat and stupid (*fei er chi*)?” Wang replies “Why are you so thin and crazy (*shou er kuang*)?” Shen wins the exchange, though, commenting that it’s better to be thin than fat, and better to be crazy than stupid, and concluding “You really are stupid!”. See Zhao Weifan, LZCJJZ, p. 172.

⁴⁹⁰ The title of this tale is according to the original manuscript edition, preserved in the *Zhuxuezhai* edition, the *Qingketi* edition, and the 24 *juan* editions and used in Lu Dahuang’s and Zhu Qikai’s versions. In the PSLQJ, however, Sheng Wei has chosen to follow the title given in the more recently discovered *Yishi* edition, where an identical tale is entitled is “The fox prostitute” Hu ji 狐妓, following the 18 *juan* edition. (PSLQJ pp 502-506). I have followed the most recent Ren Duxing edition, and retained the title “Yatou”.

⁴⁹¹ PSLQJ p. 503.

⁴⁹² PSLQJ p. 751.

people saw her reacting to everything as if in a daze (人見其事事類痴), they laughed at her even more.”⁴⁹³

The ultimate example of the state of semi-paralysis implied by this use of *chi*, is when the protagonist actually enters a comatosis, in which his soul leaves his body. As described in Chapter 4, this is a theme common to many *Liaozhai* tales, facilitating the shift from the real to the illusory. The body which is left behind, in some cases, can be described as *chi* since it is, to all intents and purposes, lifeless.

After his father's death, Xi Fangping (席方平; 7:19) decides to take revenge on the ghost who had cheated him, by making a trip to the Underworld. In order to facilitate such a journey, he transposes himself into a kind of coma: “He went silent, standing up, then sitting down; he appeared comatose, since his soul had left his body (自此不復言，時坐時立，狀類痴，蓋魂已離舍矣).”⁴⁹⁴ In “Shen Shi” (7:31) there had been a series of rapes in the Kang's 亢 house. His daughter was discovered “lying naked on the bed, seemingly comatose (狀類痴), only reviving after a long time.” Meinü (梅女; 5:20) is reborn into the Zhan 展 family, but then her soul leaves her body to seek revenge on a corrupt official who had slandered her in her previous life. In a rare use of the term in a more strictly medical sense, Meinü is described as very beautiful, but “demented (病痴), and often had her tongue hanging out, like a dog forever looking upwards at the sun.”⁴⁹⁵ In this tale, she is also described as “completely foolish (痴絕)” because she “doesn't understand proper decorum” when Scholar Feng 封生 comes to propose marriage to her and is also referred to as a “foolish girl (痴女)” by her father. Feng, however, has carried her soul back with him, and she recovers. He insists that she is not foolish (不痴)⁴⁹⁶ and her family are amazed.

⁴⁹³ PSLQJ p. 625.

⁴⁹⁴ PSLQJ p. 179.

⁴⁹⁵ PSLQJ p. 606.

⁴⁹⁶ All from PSLQJ p. 606.

These examples of *chi*, whether referring to states of silence, inactivity, or comatosis, all suggest a temporary powerlessness to relate to external reality. Verbal communication is an attempt to relate self to others, and one of the most basic functions of social interaction. The characters discussed above have, usually as a result of distress, shock or emotional turmoil, become totally self-absorbed, and lost the skills necessary to function in society. As in the last category, they suffer from an inability to cope with reality.

- Ambiguity

While, as I stated above, the vast majority of these terms are used positively, there are exceptions. It is reasonable to assume that when Fan Shiyiniang 范十一娘 discovers that her elder brother has been disrespectful to her bosom friend Feng Sanniang (封三娘; 4:04) she calls him “foolish brother” (痴兄)⁴⁹⁷ with genuine annoyance. Also, the fox spirit who tries to seduce Scholar Dong (董生; 1:44) and refers to her former husband as a fool (痴郎)⁴⁹⁸ is most likely not wishing to heap praise upon him.

Appended to the tale “Magic Arts” (Yaoshu 妖術; 1:24) in which the protagonist refuses to be duped by a fortuneteller who claims to be able to avert an imminent calamity on payment of a fee, the Historian of the Strange comments that “paying for one’s fortune to be read is a kind of folly (買卜為一痴).”⁴⁹⁹ The closing comment by the Historian of the Strange, to the tale “Geomancy” (堪輿; 4:34) seems to appeal for moderation: “The art of geomancy may have some rationale to it, but if you were to become obsessive in your belief in it, that would be foolish (痴).”⁵⁰⁰

In any case, the negative connotations of *chi* certainly seem to persist in society. In “Drinking mate” (酒友; 2:04) the scholar protagonist complains “I am addicted to alcohol, and people think I am foolish (我癖于曲藥而人以為痴).”⁵⁰¹ He is therefore

⁴⁹⁷ PSLQJ p. 509.

⁴⁹⁸ PSLQJ p. 120.

⁴⁹⁹ PSLQJ p. 81

⁵⁰⁰ PSLQJ p. 560.

⁵⁰¹ PSLQJ p. 160.

delighted to find a soul-mate in a fox who also enjoys his drink. However, an insight into the apparently different opinion of the other world is provided at the end of “The strangeness of pigeons” (鴿異; 5:05), when the Historian of the Strange declares “we can see from this that the spirit world is angered by greed, but is not angered by folly (怒貪而不怒痴).”⁵⁰²

If we argue that Pu Songling was basically in “praise of folly” then, as was the case with his western counterparts, a degree of contradiction is inescapable. Walter Kaiser has described the similar paradox in the meaning of ‘fool’ during the European renaissance: “For while, on the one hand, it remained a term of opprobrium or condescension, on the other hand, it had become a term of praise and aspiration. One could say of an idiot that he was only a fool because he was not wise; but one could also say of a wise man that he would be wiser if he were a fool.”⁵⁰³ These examples of *chi* are in tune with late Ming romantic trends, implying a positive idealism or naiveté, and simultaneously a resulting social, physical or emotional dysfunction.

However, to return to the naive protagonists of the beginning of this chapter, it is notable that they all discard this folly in order to find sexual fulfilment, to progress in their careers or generally become more established within society. In a tale that is partially self-parody, Pu describes a kind of bookworm spirit, the brother of Suqiu (素秋; 7:20). He reluctantly began to take the exams, at his friend’s urging, did brilliantly well in the lower levels, but then, when the pressure became too much for him, he fell ill and died. The historian comments, “Dying the first time he failed the exams..... the bookworm’s foolishness (痴) is really pitiable (一何可憐)!”⁵⁰⁴ It is left deliberately unclear whether such foolishness would be more or less pitiable if the bookworm had had several attempts at the exams before he died.

⁵⁰² PSLQJ p. 742.

⁵⁰³ Walter Kaiser, *Praises of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais and Shakespeare* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) p.11.

⁵⁰⁴ PSLQJ p. 907.

This parallels a basic contradiction in Pu Songling's life that, despite his idealist leanings, and his frequent railing against the injustices of the exam system and society, he persistently endeavoured to become part of this very system, every three years, for the great majority of his adult life.

Section B ~ *Chi* as characteristic of the author

The term *chi* also appears frequently throughout Pu Songling's non-fiction writings. Although these other writings constitute two thirds of the anthology, they have been much neglected in studies of Pu Songling to date.

As suggested in the second chapter of this thesis, some aspects of Pu's own life and outlook can be described as trapped in a type of childlikeness, an unwillingness to compromise to suit reality. The necessity to adapt to social convention, both within the eight-legged essays, and in the sense of pandering to the necessary officials, was one of the obstacles facing scholars as they progressed up the examination ladder. Pu's successive failures at the provincial level of the system reflect aspects of his personality which include idealism, persistence, and naiveté.

In what follows I hope to show that these characteristics are also aspects of the quality of *chi* which has been identified as crucial to an understanding of Pu's personality, and which he claims in his preface. I suggest these aspects are manifested in an extreme and persistent idealism, a detachment from and inability to relate to the outside world, and a stupefaction of thoughts and emotions. In many ways, Pu himself is the epitome of the *chi ren*, in this regard.

Twentieth century Chinese critics have been quick to point this out. Wang Ping, adopting a psychoanalytical approach, has suggested that *chi* is an attribute both of Pu's attitude to

the examination system, and also of his approach to his writing.⁵⁰⁵ Ma Jigao has suggested that for Pu *chi* was “both an ideal and a guiding principle for one’s life.”⁵⁰⁶

In his preface to the tales, the *Liaozhai zizhi*, Pu Songling admits to his own foolishness, and refuses to disown it: “This madness (*kuang*) is indeed irrepressible, and so I continually give vent to my vast feelings and don’t even forbid this folly (痴且不諱).” It is interesting that Pu believes he does possess the power to control the folly, but makes a conscious choice not to, while his madness appears more difficult to dispel. He then underscores the unconventionality of this position, when he wonders, “Won’t I be laughed at by serious men?”⁵⁰⁷

In his non-fiction writings, Pu repeatedly describes himself as *chi*. He uses the term a total of forty-five times in these writings, usually in a self-reflexive manner, and the frequency of these references underlines its significance as an insight into his character. It also provides us with some evidence for Pu’s own approbation of this characteristic, since one could hardly repeatedly claim to be a fool without ironic overtones.

One example is a poem written on resigning his teaching post, Pu declares that he longs to transcend the world but, “I’m afraid that not even in the clouds of heaven is there an immortal as foolish as I (*wu ci chi xian* 無此痴仙).”⁵⁰⁸ Throughout his life he maintains that *chi* is an essential aspect of his personality. In a flattering dedication to Governor Shi 時, Pu contrasts this man’s success with his own situation “As for me, I am old these days, but my foolish emotion (*chi qing* 痴情) is just as in the past.”⁵⁰⁹ In 1689 Pu wrote an appreciation of the Rock Shade Garden at the Bi residence, to which he had grown very attached. “The thin bamboo is hollow, just like my foolishness (*shou zhu wu xin, lei*

⁵⁰⁵ Wang Ping, op.cit., pp.6-10.

⁵⁰⁶ Ma Jigao, op.cit., p. 225.

⁵⁰⁷ Zeitlin, *Historian*, p. 44.

⁵⁰⁸ “Zi qian 自遣”, to the tune Da Sheng Le 大聖樂, PSLQJ p. 2014, PSLCJ p. 32.

⁵⁰⁹ “Ti shi ming fu yu shan jiu yi shuwo 題時明府余山舊意書屋” [For the Nostalgia study of Governor Shi of Yushan] PSLQJ pp. 1112-3; LZWJ pp. 106-7.

wo chi 瘦竹無心類我痴)⁵¹⁰ In 1697, while drinking with another friend at the Bi's residence, Pu compares the perceived parasitism of his position as a tutor in someone else's household to the migrating geese who fly in search of the sun.⁵¹¹ Pu pities such birds saying that they are foolish like him (*lian suiyang yan chi ru wo* 憐隨陽雁痴如我), because neither he nor they will settle down at home. In a series of poems written when he was 65 years old, Pu bemoans his old age and failing health: "My eyes grow dim but fortunately this doesn't hinder my reading; while I still have a tongue, this is sufficient for me to proclaim my crazy folly 宣狂痴."⁵¹²

Chi is not a straightforward concept for Pu, however. While on the one hand he condones the quality, as mentioned above, he is also aware of its conventionally negative aspects. One example of a negative use of the term occurs in a poem describing the famine of 1704, a particularly bad year for the Zichuan region, with a prolonged famine followed by severe floods.⁵¹³ Pu advises the local villagers not to give up alcohol, the one comfort still available to them, since drinking can help them forget their hunger: "To stop drinking in a year of famine, is particularly foolish 益一痴. What will the end of the year be like?"⁵¹⁴

This contradiction, inherent in the satirical use of a pejorative term, in some way reflects the contradictions in Pu's life, between individual idealism and eccentricity and the practical pressures to conform to convention: his great ambition in persistently attempting the exams and writing flattering memorials to the emperor in an attempt to progress his

⁵¹⁰ "Tao shu shi yin yuan 逃暑石隱園" [Escaping the sun in the rock shade garden] PSLQJ p. 1732, PSLSJ p. 160.

⁵¹¹ "Zhai zhong yu Ximei bo yin 齋中與希梅薄飲" [Having a couple of drinks in my study with Li Ximei] PSLQJ p. 1778, PSLSJ p. 206.

⁵¹² "Bing chi 病痴 [bad teeth]" PSLQJ p. 1848, LZSJ p. 276.

⁵¹³ For details of the catastrophes of this year, see NP, pp. 51-2. In another, similar usage, Pu wrote a poem to comfort the peasants who had lost much of their harvest in the heavy rains of 1709 {"he duo zai bian, wei ji nong ren 禾多災變慰藉農人" [Many natural disasters can happen to crops; some comfort for the farmers] PSLQJ p. 1898, PSLSJ p. 327}. His way of doing this was to tell them that the previous year's losses, in the great drought, were even greater. He ends this poem with an appeal to them to control their distress and be satisfied with their lot: "This time we must suffer some losses, but I predict it will surpass last year's, when half of the harvest was just husks. Where will this common sentiment and foolish avarice end (su qing tan chi he you qiong 俗情貪痴何有窮)? Many people may be resentful, but I am not."

⁵¹⁴ "Chongyang qian yi ri zuo 重陽前一曰作" [Written on the day before the double ninth festival], PSLQJ p. 1841, LZSJ p. 269.

career, in contrast to his idealism and bitter satirical attacks on the corruption of the age. In 1674 Pu wrote a series of six poems dedicated to his good friend Wang Rushui 王如水. One of these, a recollection of the gatherings they had held in the Wangs' west garden, ends with a self-justification: "Since I do not consider it stupid to be persistent, neither do I despise crazy songs as foolish 狂歌不厭痴."⁵¹⁵ On the other hand, in one of his most descriptive images of this concept, he recognises the futility of blind persistence: "I casually watch a fly hitting against the paper [window], and laugh at those foolish people (*chi ren*) who make obstacles for themselves."⁵¹⁶

In 1696, Pu Songling received an invitation to a banquet from Zhu Xiang 朱繩, who was thirty years his junior, and with whom he had only been acquainted for three years. Despite this, Zhu's family's reputation was such that it has been suggested that this friendship was at least partly responsible for the extent of Pu Songling's later fame.⁵¹⁷ In a reply which is suitably self-deprecatory in tone, Pu Songling laments: "My reflection in the mirror is desolate and I have more new white hair, I foolishly play (*chi wan* 痴頑) and try to be like one of the people of Getian."⁵¹⁸ (Getian shi 葛天氏 was a benevolent ruler of few words, whose people were supposedly carefree and happy).

Pu also links the concept of *chi* directly with youth and the folly of adolescence. Sixty four articles in the *Complete Works of Pu Songling* are marriage announcements or petitions which Pu Songling was asked to write on behalf of others. In three of these, he refers to the would-be fiancé in a deprecatory way, as a 'young fool' (*chi er* or a *chi nan*).⁵¹⁹ In a set of instructions about the best ways to prevent contact between the inner

⁵¹⁵ PSLQJ p. 1671, LZSJ p. 99.

⁵¹⁶ PSLQJ p. 2086.

⁵¹⁷ Yuan Shishuo pp. 220-243.

⁵¹⁸ "Da Zhu Ziqing jian guo hui jiu 答朱子青見過惠酒" [In reply to Zhu Ziqing's gracious invitation] PSLQJ p. 1768, PSLSJ p. 196.

⁵¹⁹ The three petitions where this term occurs are: "You yu Yan lao qi" 又與燕老啟, [Another petition addressed to the venerable Yan] PSLQJ p. 1278, LZWJ p. 272; "Zhongqiu dai Bi Xinlao yu Gao Niandong qi" 中秋代畢信老與高念東啟 [A petition on behalf of Bi Xinlao to Gao Niandong, at a mid-Autumn festival] PSLQJ pp. 1283-4, LZWJ pp. 277-8 (Gao Niandong is one of the courtesy names of Gao Heng 高珩 (1612-1697), from Zichuan, who wrote one of the two original prefaces to the *Liaozhai zhiyi*); and "Dai Bi Cishi yu Zhao Gaoru qi" 代畢刺史與趙膏如啟 [A petition written for Censor Bi to Zhao Gaoru] PSLQJ pp. 1295-6; LZWJ, pp. 289-90.

and outer sections of one's house, Pu suggests constructing a double door between them, for security and that, should one require to send messages between them, it was not appropriate to use a bold servant (*da dan pu* 大膽仆) and one should rather send a foolish youngster (*chi youzhe* 痴幼者).⁵²⁰ In a description of the scene when Zhang Mei 張嵎, the magistrate of Zichuan, first arrived at his new post, in 1686 "foolish girls (*chi nü* 痴女) from the mountain villages were peeping out around the doors."⁵²¹ This usage may simply imply young girls, but probably also carries connotations of their inappropriate behaviour.

Below, I will attempt to analyse some aspects of *chi*, repeatedly professed by Pu Songling. I argue that in the overwhelming majority of cases, the instances of *chi* in Pu's non-fictional writings are positive in connotation and that they reflect aspects of the childlikeness in his character explored above. These aspects include an idealism with regard to scholarship, romance and worldly affairs, and a deeply introverted and strongly focussed mindset resulting in a stupefaction of thoughts and/or emotions, to the extent that relations with the outside world become problematic.

- The scholar-idealist

Idealist attitudes to studying and the examinations of many fictional *Liaozhai* protagonists were described in the previous chapter. The ultimate idealist in this regard is, of course, Pu Songling himself and some usages of *chi* reflect this.

The first occurrence of the term in the *Collected Liaozhai Writings* (*Liaozhai wenji* 聊齋文集) is in the preface to a letter of congratulation to Song Jingxuan on entering an academic institute.⁵²² The whole content of the letter, a description of how Jingxuan's

⁵²⁰ PSLQJ, p. 2368 from p. 308 of the appendix entitled "Huai xing lu 懷形錄" [Reflections on conventions].

⁵²¹ "He Zhang Yihou guo Mingshui zhi zuo 和張邑侯過明水之作" [Composed to accompany Magistrate Zhang's poem about passing Mingshui] PSLQJ pp. 1706-7, LZSJ, p. 1134-5.

⁵²² "He Song Jingxuan ru pan xu" 賀宋靜軒入泮序, [A preface to congratulate Song Jingxuan on entering an academic institute] PSLQJ pp. 1090-1091 LZWJ pp. 84-85.

father continued to pursue his studies even as his finances declined considerably and his whole family was plunged into poverty, is a tacit approval of the kind of idealistic determination to succeed which is itself an aspect of *chi*. Specifically in this preface, however, Jingxuan himself is described as 'a foolish child [*chi er* 痴兒] who is willing to be left to his own devices, to endure cold and hunger' for the sake of his studies.

Certain Chinese writers have always been associated with romantic ideals, and preference for such writings is likewise indicative of the idealist leanings of an individual reader. "An explication of 'Collecting medicine and money for monk Snowdust'"⁵²³ is an account of the life and work of this monk.⁵²⁴ In this essay, the description *chi* is linked both to childhood, and to the twinned concept of being a fool for love (*qing chi* 情痴) which was common in late Ming literature: "When he was very young he was a romantic fool, cherishing Qu and Song; as a youth his nature became obsessive (*pi*), loving Qi Bo and the Yellow Emperor." The first reference is to the two poets of the Warring States period, Qu Yuan 屈原 and Song Yu 宋玉, whose names are linked to the writing of the *Songs of Chu* (Chu ci 楚辭) a great anthology of poetry about heroes, mystical journeys and the like, which champions "the voice of the official out of office."⁵²⁵ The second reference is to the two reputed founders of Chinese medicine. There is a definite progression implied here, in the sense of the younger idealism giving way to more practical pursuits. Moreover this line may suggest that the mental state of *chi* is a prerequisite for the obsession to develop.

In a humorous article, entitled "On giving up social engagements,"⁵²⁶ the author describes vividly his frustration and lack of inspiration to write, then catches sight of his own shadow, which seems to look just like the demon-slayer Zhong Kui 鍾馗 and he laughs at "the awkward folly of the poor scholar (*cuoda zhi daichi* 措大之呆痴)."

⁵²³ "Wei xue hui heshang mu yao zi shu" 為雪灰和尚募藥資疏 PSLQJ pp. 1095-6; LZWJ pp. 89-90.

⁵²⁴ It is likely this is the same monk he later ridicules for breaking his vows: PSLQJ p. 1957, LZSJ p. 385.

⁵²⁵ This is the conclusion of Charles Hartman, in his entry on the *Chuci* in the ICTCL, p. 348.

⁵²⁶ "Jie ying chouwen" 戒應酬文, PSLQJ, pp. 1382-3, LZWJ, pp. 376-7.

- The romantic optimist

In the fifth of a series of poems written in 1697, in appreciation of his friendship with Bi Weizhong 畢韋仲, Pu writes: "Sorrow takes advantage of my declining emotions to increase my white hair; though destined to be poor, in my foolish mental state I still dream of gold 痴緒夢黃金."⁵²⁷ In the second of two poems written to celebrate the demise of Zhao Shixian 趙世顯, the notoriously corrupt and exploitative provincial governor of Shandong, Pu Songling ponders the future of his county. "Who will alleviate the suffering of us in the eastern areas? Everyone is foolishly hoping 痴望 for Li Meiya⁵²⁸ to arrive."⁵²⁹

In a lengthy piece probably intended as an instruction manual for his pupils, entitled "Records of self-examination" (Xing shen yulu 省身語錄),⁵³⁰ Pu states: "Cherishing something so much that you are unable to give it up, and sinking into depression, are both kinds of romantic folly (*qing chi*)."⁵³¹ However, this apparent warning against such excess may reflect the contradictions in Pu's position as tutor. In a more personal account, Pu contends that he came to be convinced of the power of 'foolish love' after reading an elegy by Zhang Lüqing 張履慶, who had just lost his wife.⁵³² In a poem written in 1675, he relates this conversion:

"Whenever there was talk of the foolish love (*qing chi*) of old, I always had my doubts,
But after reading these elegies tears are streaming across my face.
I finally realise that there are indeed moments of pure emotion,

⁵²⁷ "Zeng Bi zi Weizhong 贈畢子韋仲" [For Bi Weizhong], PSLQJ p. 1783, LZSJ p. 211.

⁵²⁸ Li Meiya 李梅崖 was the one-time governor of Jiangxi, reputed to be an upstanding honest man, who later retired to become a hermit. (see Zhao Weifan, op.cit. pp. 559-60).

⁵²⁹ "Xi kaifu you qian bao 喜開府有遷報 [Pleased to see the report of the provincial governor leaving his post]," PSLQJ p. 1889, LZSJ p. 317.

⁵³⁰ PSLQJ pp. 2071-2112.

⁵³¹ PSLQJ p. 2084.

⁵³² Zhang Luqing's *hao* is recorded in the local gazetteer as Xuanshi, but Pu Songling, both here and in a dedication to this elegy Zhang wrote to his wife (PSLQJ, p. 1110-1), always refers to him as Zhang Shixuan. See Zhao Weifan, LZSJZ, p. 171.

Even Fengqian⁵³³ in the olden days was not as foolish as this (*wei shi chi* 未是痴).⁵³⁴

One of Pu Songling's most moving pieces is the elegy he wrote on the death of his wife, Liu 劉, in 1713.⁵³⁵ Jaroslev Prusek noted its importance in 1970, translating it in full.⁵³⁶ Pu sets Liu against her sisters-in-law, who are described as "apparently clever and artful (*wan ruo hui xia* 宛若慧黠)".⁵³⁷ In contrast when, after a poor harvest, the family property is divided up between Songling and his brothers, her sisters-in-law are fighting over the best items, while Liu is "silent as if she were a fool (*mo ruo chi* 默若痴)".⁵³⁸

- The aspiring recluse?

As many of his contemporaries in the literary field, Pu sometimes flirted with the ideal of retreating to the mountains and living as a hermit. As was noted in chapter 3, this type of lifestyle had become a fashionable aspiration for many literati at this time, and was the source of some resentment by those who saw this as a unwelcome secularisation of the true ideals of the recluse. In one poem written in praise of such a reclusive lifestyle, Pu describes it as "very lonely, but half foolish and half cunning (*chi xia ban* 痴黠半)".⁵³⁹ In a poem which is otherwise an overwhelmingly positive depiction of a hermit's life, this usage of *chi* underlines some of the inherent contradictions it held for Pu.

⁵³³ A reference to Xun Fengqian 荀奉倩, who was ridiculed for dying of grief after his wife passed away (*Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語; *huo ni* 惑溺).

⁵³⁴ "Du Zhang Shixuan daowang shi bing zhuan" 讀張視旋悼亡詩并傳 [On reading Zhang Shixuan's lament and biography] PSLQJ p. 1681, LZSJ, p. 109.

⁵³⁵ "Shu Liu shi xing shi" 述劉氏行實 [On the life and work of Mme Liu] PSLQJ, pp. 1307-8, LZWJ, pp. 301-2.

⁵³⁶ See "Two documents relating to the life of Pu Songling" in Prusek's *Chinese History and Literature*, (Holland: D.Reidel, 1970), pp. 85-91. The other document Prusek singles out for translation is the inscription by Zhang Yuan, on Pu Songling's gravestone.

⁵³⁷ It seems there was no love lost between Pu and his sisters-in-law. There is even some debate as to whether it is one of these who provided the inspiration for the various shrew characters in Pu's work.

⁵³⁸ I discuss the many instances where *chi* is linked to silence, later in this chapter.

⁵³⁹ "Qian ti 前題" [As before] to the tune "Wu su nian 無俗念", PSLQJ p. 2024, PSLCJ, p. 42.

The romantic appeal for Pu of life away from town life is clear from the article “Setting off to visit Wang Yihou of Jianchuan”,⁵⁴⁰ in which he describes how his life as a tutor in a rural area has caused him to become afflicted with a kind of folly, problematic when dealing with the daily necessities of modern life. “I take up my pen as if it were a plough, and read articles for a living. Travelling throughout the vast seas, still with no true friend [zhiji]; I keep asking the azure heavens, but there is still no answer. Because I am so happy in poverty and free of ambitions, I have acquired the folly of woods and valleys (*linhe zhi chi* 林壑之痴); occasionally when I come to the city to pay tax, I even forget the road to the official gate!”

Pu apparently even half-seriously considered taking up Buddhism. Included in an appendix to the *Liaozhai shi ji*, is an undated poem which satirizes a Buddhist master who has broken his vows after three years of hardship. With the strong Buddhist imagery throughout this poem, it is reasonable to assume that *chi* here has the Buddhist meaning of *moha* or obstinate delusion: “yet he laughs at the profundity of his former delusion 笑從前痴已深, when every morning his hungry eyes had gazed at illusory flowers.”⁵⁴¹ In a satirical piece of self-ridicule, Pu Songling describes himself attempting to turn to Buddhism, holding the rosary beads and meditating, but being unable to give up physical pleasures. Finally “I turn my head and laugh at my folly and craziness (*hui tou zi xiao chi dian* 回頭自笑痴顛) attempting to learn to be half a sage.”⁵⁴²

- The dysfunctional subject

The remaining examples of *chi*, which refer to the stupefied, dysfunctional state described above in relation to characters in the stories, take such contradiction in Pu Songling’s life one stage further. In contrast to the examples above where his inability to cope in society

⁵⁴⁰ “Shang Jianchuan Wang Yihou qi” 上健川汪邑侯啟, PSLQJ p. 1222, LZWJ p. 216.

⁵⁴¹ “Chao Xuehui chanshi po jie 嘲雪灰禪師破戒 [In mockery of the Zen master Snowdust breaking his vows of abstinence] PSLQJ p. 1957, LZSJ p. 385.

⁵⁴² “Zao qi zi chan, yi er zi chao 早起自懺，已而自嘲” [Initially feeling guilty, then laughing at myself], to the tune of Zui taiping 醉太平, PSLQJ p. 2013, PSLCJ p. 31. It is quite possible that here, within this heavily Buddhist context, *chi* may again have the full significance of *moha*, or obstinate delusion.

is a result of idealism or infatuation, in this state, he is physically unable to relate to his surroundings. He often loses powers of speech and movement. As such, he experiences the ultimate mental introversion, and this single emotion or condition becomes all-encompassing to him.

In his non-fiction writings, Pu Songling frequently describes himself as being reduced to this state, usually caused by illness, shock or grief. It is striking how much of Pu's poetry in particular is concerned with such emotion, a stark contrast with much of the optimism evident in many of his other writings.⁵⁴³

A large percentage of Pu's writings, particularly his poetry, is concerned with his failing health, and the onset of old age. The ageism inherent in the exam system, described in Chapter 2, can only have added to candidates' increased consciousness of their own ageing processes. The deterioration in Pu's physical condition appears to mirror his inability to relate to his surroundings. Specifically, loss of functions such as hearing and sight directly increase this sense of isolation from the outside world. It is ironic that similar symptoms can be indicative of infancy and old age, much the same as the idea of a 'second childhood'. Both conditions display an increased introspection and a non-association with others, and both can be symptomatic of *chi*.

In 1679, having lain ill for three months, Pu Songling describes his emotional, physical and mental state:-

"I only am conscious of my own medicine, not sparing a thought for my wife and children.

⁵⁴³ Aside from the examples listed below, the only mention of *chi* in the non-fiction works of the PSLQJ is in the *Collected Liaozhai fu poems* (*Liaozhai fuji* 聊齋賦集), in the rhapsody entitled "Praying for rain". Unfortunately this text only survives in fragmentary form and the character following *chi* and thus the context, is missing. ("Dao yu fu" 禱雨賦, PSLQJ pp. 2049-50, LZPJ, pp. 7-8.) There is no mention of *chi* in the remaining sections of the PSLQJ: short *qu* plays (*xiao qu* 小曲); three plays (*xi san chu* 戲三出); An account of grass and trees (*Caomu zhuan* 草木傳); Pu Songling's life (*Pu Songling nianpu* 蒲松齡年譜); Genealogy of the Pu family (*Pu Shi shixi biao* 蒲松齡世系表); Reference material (*cankao ziliao* 參考資料).

My bones are frail, and my heart is ever more exhausted, my thoughts are foolish, and even my dreams are stupid (*xiang chi meng yi yu* 想痴夢亦愚).⁵⁴⁴

In 1680 while ill at the Bi residence, Pu describes his dejection at his ill health, feeling particularly despondent during the period for ancestor sacrifice, in which he is unable to take part. He emphasises the distance he feels from his family and his impotence to change the situation, by describing himself as a “foolish guest” (*chi ke* 痴客).⁵⁴⁵

In an appeal entitled “Trying hard to resign from a teaching post,”⁵⁴⁶ which was presumably written just before he stopped teaching at the Bi residence in 1709,⁵⁴⁷ Pu sets out the reasons why he feels he has to offer his resignation: “I have never known much about the affairs of the world, and now I am deaf I have become even more foolish (*chi*); my personality is such that I cannot bear noise, now I am old I feel even more tired.” The degree of his *chi* is increased through his deafness, a further hindrance to communication with the outside world.

A humorous article entitled “Blaming his white moustache”⁵⁴⁸ is a self-parody of Pu’s frustration and anger at getting old. He writes a poem blaming his troubles on his greying moustache and then the god of moustaches appears to him in a dream, indignantly demanding why he was being blamed for Pu becoming old, when he had done nothing wrong. When Pu wakes up, he describes himself as disturbed and in a state of terror,

⁵⁴⁴ “Bing zhong” 病中 [While ill] PSLQJ, p. 1690, PSLSJ, p. 118.

⁵⁴⁵ “Zhongyuan bing zu bu neng gui” 中元病足不能歸 [Being so ill at the Ancestor festival that I was unable to return home] to the tune *Man ting fang* 滿庭芳 PSLQJ, p. 2003, LZCJ p. 21. In a later stanza of the same *ci* poem, he says he is “emaciated and fatigued, foolish geese explain my dreams (*chi e jie meng* 痴鵝解夢); with the onset of autumn, comes inexhaustible sorrow.” This is a reference to the Six Dynasties story of “The scholar in the geese’s cage” (*E long shusheng* 鵝籠書生), in which a scholar who is tired is invited to sit in the geese’s cage and thus becomes involved in a illusory dream world. According to Zhao Weifan “The geese in the story are called ‘*chi*’ because they show no surprise when the scholar gets in and sits alongside them; the self-perpetuating illusions in the story create a dream world, to which the geese are witnesses, and so they can be said to be explaining the dream.” (Zhao Weifan, LZCJJZ, p. 126). Here Pu is comparing himself to this scholar to reflect his loneliness, and his own feeling of being lost in his own thoughts.

⁵⁴⁶ “Li ci xuezhang qi” 力辭學長呈 PSLQJ p. 1249; LZWJ p. 243.

⁵⁴⁷ While Pu’s poetry is arranged according to date, articles from the *Liaozhai wenji* are more difficult to date. However, from the content of the essay, the only other possible date for this piece is 1670, when he stopped teaching at the Wangs. If so, this would be an extreme example of Pu’s paranoia about growing old.

⁵⁴⁸ “Ze bai zi wen” 責白髭文 PSLQJ, pp. 1381-2, LZWJ, pp. 375-6.

which renders him “foolish as a wooden doll, not daring to make a sound (*chi ruo mu'ou*, *bu gan chu sheng* 痴若木偶不敢出聲).”

Sudden shocks like this can render an individual *chi*, in the sense of being incapacitated. One of Pu's most vivid descriptions of his mental state is written after he mistakenly skipped a page of his exam paper, in the county exam of 1687.⁵⁴⁹ According to examination protocol, such an error would lead to immediate disqualification:-

“Smugly I dashed off a piece, then realised my huge mistake -- this feeling is like no other! I felt as if a thousand ladles of cold sweat had stained my clothes, as though my soul had left my body, but I was neither in pain, nor discomfort. I sat in a daze (*chi zuo* 痴坐) for some time, in this same trance, and thought that this was my own doing, and I have never felt the need to conceal defeat. As one who can endure bitterness, my youth is gradually disappearing, I am unworthy of the lamp on my desk.”⁵⁵⁰

This horrific discovery leaves Pu in a comatose state in which he feels literally spiritless, as though his soul had departed. Other uses of *chi* in these writings also reflect this meaning. Pu describes the scene of people gradually coming out from their shelters in a state of shock after the floods in the locality have receded and trying to return to their normal lives and make some plans for the future. Pu compares their stupefied state to that of dumb animals, specifically “foolish dogs (*chi quan* 痴犬).”⁵⁵¹

After the sudden death of Pu's mother in 1680, Pu and his brothers need money to cover the funeral expenses. With no means of their own, nor rich friends to call on, they simply look at one other in a daze (*xiang chi dui* 相痴對) at a loss at what to do.⁵⁵² Wang Rushui

⁵⁴⁹ See NP pp. 35-6. While previously most scholars had attributed this error, described in the *nianpu* as *yuefu* (越幅) to exceeding the word limit for the exam, Yang Hairu (1994) persuasively argues that Pu's mistake was rather to leave a blank page in his test paper. Yang's theory is now generally accepted.

⁵⁵⁰ “Weizhong yuefu bei chu, meng Bi ba xiong guan qing weiji, gan er you zuo 閨中越幅被黜，蒙畢八兄關情慰藉，感而有作” [Moved by brother Bi's kindness and comfort after I was disqualified from the exam for skipping a page] to the tune *Da sheng le* 大聖樂, PSLQJ p. 2032, PSLCJ, p. 50.

⁵⁵¹ “Xi qing fu die qian yun 喜晴復疊前韻” [Happily returning, under a clear sky] to the tune *He xin liang* 賀新涼, PSLQJ p. 2014, PSLCJ, p. 32.

⁵⁵² “Ji huai Wang Rushui” 寄懷王如水 [Relying on Wang Rushui] (abbreviated title) PSLQJ pp. 1708-9, LZSJ pp. 136-7.

offers his help and the main theme of this poem is Pu's unease at having to be in debt to his good friend. Five years later, Pu wrote two memorial poems to celebrate the life of the father of the local magistrate Zhong Shengyu 鍾聖與.⁵⁵³ In the introduction to these poems, Pu insists that although "my emotions have become stupefied, this is in no way deliberate 情逢痴處絕無肺腸; as I find I have lost all direction, I can only shed tears."⁵⁵⁴ Pu's *chi* is entirely beyond his control.

These states of *chi*, all brought on by illness, sudden shock or grief leave the subject in a daze, and entirely unable to function normally, or relate to the outside world.⁵⁵⁵ While also indicative of childlikeness in the sense of incapacity, these examples provide a stark contrast to the romantic optimism and idealism discussed above.

In a poem for Liu Kongji 劉孔集, written in 1679, Pu seems to become aware of this very contradiction.⁵⁵⁶ After describing their great friendship and thinking nostalgically of the time they spent studying together, he then indulges himself in a bout of self-pity, describing his own poor health, his white hair (he's only thirty-nine years old at this time) and his failed career aspirations. "What is a lowly person like me to do?" he asks

⁵⁵³ Zhong Shengyu was magistrate of Zhangqiu county.

⁵⁵⁴ PSLQJ p 1704, LZSJ p. 132.

⁵⁵⁵ Further uses of the term to imply shock and grief occur in the following: "A reply to Chen Xinghua, on the 20th." where the writer expresses his distress at his friend's sufferings in the following terms: "And then I heard of your Excellency's plight, and was shocked and heartbroken, wiping away tears until I became dazed (*cheng chi* 成痴), I don't know what Young Lad Creation [a common trope for the personification of the creative force] is planning with this." Sun goes on to say that if he can be of any assistance he will at once come to his aid, saying he is willing to bankrupt himself if necessary to help his friend. Of course as Pu is writing on behalf of his employer Sun Hui, it is impossible to know how free he was to choose his terminology. ("Ershi ri da Chen Xinghua" 二十日答陳興化, PSLQJ p. 1200; LZWJ p. 194). Pu Songling also uses this sense of the term to describe the despair of the Bi family when, in 1687, Bi Shengyu and his son, Bi Shichi, both die within three months of each other. Pu projects the family's emotions onto the garden: "Stupefied to the extreme (*chi jue* 痴絕) the golden-thread willow on the south brook, with its long branches strokes the wintry pool as before." ("Wan Bi Gongquan 挽畢公權" [An elegy for Bi Gongquan] PSLQJ pp. 1712-3, PSLSJ p. 140-1). The poem "Spring Resentment" (*chun yuan* 春怨), which also forms the crux of the *Liaozhai* tale Miss Huan (Huan niang 宦娘; 5:43) as the means by which the two lovers are united, also underlines the dysfunctional qualities of a person afflicted by *chi*: "Becoming dazed from my grief (*yin hen cheng chi* 因恨成痴), from contemplation to brooding, every day I am crazy with emotion." (Written to the tune "Xi yu chun man" 惜餘春慢) PSLQJ p. 1998, PSLCJ p. 16). In "Sacrifice for the venerable Han Li" Pu recalls how the ancients used to "release their foolish sadness on Mt. Niushou [a mountain very close to Pu's hometown]" (*fa chi bei yu niushou* 發痴悲于牛首) ("Ji Han Li lao" 祭韓麗老 PSLQJ, pp. 1316-7; LZWJ, pp. 310-311).

⁵⁵⁶ "Zeng Liu Kongji 贈劉孔集" [For Liu Kongji] PSLQJ p. 1691, LZSJ, p. 119.

despondently. The turning point in this poem, however, is the poet's self-realisation of his foolishness (*hui tou zi jue chi* 回頭自覺痴). After this, the poem takes on a much more optimistic tone. He determines to make the best of things, to relieve his pain and resentment by eating and drinking better, even stating that utopias such as Penglai and the Peach Blossom spring can be found in this world, and insisting that Liu and he will meet together again.

• Conclusion

In the above survey, I have considered all usages of *chi*, firstly in the *Liaozhai zhiyi*, and then in Pu's non-fiction works, to explore whether the ideas of childlikeness dealt with in this thesis are also reflected in the use of this term. I have identified parallel aspects of folly in the fictional characters of the first section, with Pu's own life in the second. This mental state is a complex one, for which "folly" is perhaps an inadequate translation.⁵⁵⁷

A salient feature of many characters in the *Liaozhai* tales, *chi* implies youthful innocence, perseverance, and idealism, as well as incompetence, stupefaction and infatuation. In all instances, it suggests an inability to relate to, or to deal with, the external world. This state of mind, in which emotional responses become fused, and knowledge and learning are rendered practically useless, results in an inability to relate to social reality. It is often characterised by an inability to speak, the most fundamental requirement for relating to one's environment, and/or by physical immobility. This state can be reached through fear, through resentment, through shock, as for example the image of Pu himself in the examination hall having just discovered he had ruined his chances by a foolish mistake, but also through love, where it results in an infatuation which refuses to be tempered by reality. Behaving in a socially appropriate manner, a virtue held in high esteem in Confucian tradition, becomes an impossibility. The main difficulty faced by both the naive protagonists in the *Liaozhai* and by Pu Songling himself, is that through being true

⁵⁵⁷ I hasten to add that translations are, of course, rarely adequate and I have been unable to find a better English word to describe this state.

to themselves, in a world of corrupt bureaucrats where power and wealth are valued above ability, they necessarily become socially dysfunctional.

When someone is *chi* he/she cannot be distracted. This is reminiscent of the focused mental state of the infant's mind (*chixin* 赤心) discussed in Chapter 3, whose fundamental quality is its "absolute single-mindedness" (*zhuanyi de xinshi* 專一的心志). When an adult is reduced to this state, it is as if he or she has returned to infancy, being entirely introverted, and unable to function physically, mentally or emotionally.

The inherent contradictions in the idealisation of an essentially pejorative term reflect to some degree the contradictions in Pu's life between romantic idealism and his very persistent desire for success in his career. His own ironic and self-parodic declarations that he is foolish are also contradictory: both a defiant affirmation of the childish naiveté and idealism of his protagonists, but equally a recognition that, with his failing health and greying hair, he is wasting his life away, just like the fly he had ridiculed for persistently hitting its head against a sheet of paper.

Conclusion

In sixteenth and seventeenth-century China, within certain literati circles, the cult of childhood was at its peak. Built on a tradition of idealisation of the infantile state, it had culminated in Li Zhi's hugely influential essay, "On the childlike mind." Genuineness, naiveté, simplicity and total subjectivity were revered both as ideals to which to aspire in life, and as standards for literary criticism. The infantile state was traditionally one of innocence and purity, but also of ignorance, dependence and single-mindedness. The influence of such ideas can be seen in a wide range of personalities and writings from this period, a time which has sometimes been described as the romantic era of Chinese literature. However, until now there has been no comprehensive study of childlikeness in the life or works of Pu Songling.

I have suggested that the pattern of Pu Songling's life can be seen to mirror that of a frustrated adolescent, whose path to maturity has been blocked by factors outside of his control. I have argued that the examinations, in which he participated for almost the whole of his adult life, were structured in such a way that the different stages were seen to represent the process of an individual's progression from childhood towards adulthood. Candidates at the earliest stage were known as 'child scholars' and, as they progressed towards the degree of an 'established person,' so the inflexibility of the examinations, the emphasis on academic conventions, such as the eight-legged essay, and the concurrent disapproval of individualist writing styles, intensified. In short, there was a greater need to conform to social norms.

Doctrines which idealised childlikeness held immediate appeal for those writers who remained, often for many years, faced with the intellectual contradictions between conformity and creativity, frustrated by their lack of formal recognition and humiliated regularly by the social ridicule brought by their recurrent failure to "establish themselves" as befitting men of their years.

Many of the conflicts Pu faced between the demands of the examinations and those of 'pure' scholarship and creativity are reflected in his writing, in a thematic discourse between ideal and practicality which permeates much of his work.

The childlikeness of the stories operates at different levels. The negation of any boundary between the internal and external, illusion and reality, mortality and the afterlife, or animate and inanimate beings, together with a heightened personification of non-human creatures reveals a childlike consciousness which forms a framework for the stories. These concepts were also topics of heated debate in Neo-Confucian circles surrounding the doctrine that "nothing exists outside one's mind". Just as a child's view of the world is symptomatic of an all-encompassing subjectivity, so I believe such doctrines can also be seen as contributing, if indirectly, to the promotion of childlikeness.

A large degree of sympathy for the naiveté, childlike ignorance and impotence of many male protagonists is clear from my study of such characterisation within the *Liaozhai*. Invariably scholars, these men are usually ignorant and/or incompetent at worldly matters such as sex, money or officialdom. Instead, they are stuck within a world of bookishness, poverty and celibacy. They may fall in love, but with the purest of motives, without any urge for sexual satisfaction or dominance. They are invariably honest and generous in financial matters, and therefore are likely to be exploited. A love of books is repeatedly contrasted with a lack of success in the examinations.

Despite the generally positive portrayal of such characters, however, the 'happy' ending of the tales is inevitably brought about either by their own transformation into worldly-wise, sexually fulfilled graduates, or else by the intervention of a partner, usually a female fox-spirit, who is able to compensate for their social inadequacy, dealing with the finances and other practicalities of life on their behalf, and thus enabling them to persist in their naive innocence.

Such contradictions are also evident from my study of the concept of folly (*chi*) and its significance both as a feature of *Liaozhai* characters, and also as a characteristic of the author. Previous studies of this concept have linked it with the late Ming vogue for obsession. While the two are evidently closely connected, my survey of the childlike qualities of this mental state provides an alternative approach. Characters in the *Liaozhai* are called *chi* on account of their inability to be practical, to be realistic about a love affair, deal appropriately with financial matters and so on. This state manifests itself in an incapacity for action. The subject is often unable to speak, move or in any way relate to his or her surroundings. Pu Songling describes himself as *chi* on many occasions. The term is sometimes used positively, to denote his idealism or romanticism, but often describes his mental condition after a sudden shock, illness or bereavement. In either case, the result is again an absolute introversion and freezing of all thought and emotion. This daze-like state is reminiscent of a new-born child, before he or she begins to learn to react to or interact with his or her environment, and the frequent linguistic pairing of *chi* with terms for infants supports this. Since Pu Songling is, perhaps the archetypal *chi ren*, in his persistence at the exams even at an age where the degree would have had little practical worth to him, the contradictions inherent in this term have particular significance.

In sum, the idealisation of childlikeness is not a straightforward concept for Pu Songling and the contradictions inherent within it are reflected both in his career, and in his writings.

Appendix 1

Conversion table for numbering of Ren Duxing 任篤行 (8 *juan*) and Zhang Youhe 張友鶴 (12 *juan*) editions of the *Liaozhai*

Ren Duxing ed.	pinyin title	Zhang Youhe
1.01	kao chenghuang	1.01
1.02	erzhong ren	1.02
1.03	shi bian	1.03
1.04	penshui	1.04
1.05	tong ren yu	1.05
1.06	hua bi	1.06
1.07	shan xiao	1.07
1.08	yao gui	1.08
1.09	zhuo hu	1.09
1.10	qiaozhong guai	1.10
1.11	zhai yao	1.11
1.12	Wang Liulang	1.12
1.13	tou tao	1.13
1.14	zhong li	1.14
1.15	Laoshan daoshi	1.15
1.16	Changqing seng	1.16
1.17	she ren	1.17
1.18	zhuo mang	1.18
1.19	quan jian	1.19
1.20	bao shen	1.20
1.21	hu jia nü	1.21
1.22	Jiaona	1.22
1.23	seng nie	1.23
1.24	yao shu	1.24
1.25	ye gou	1.25
1.26	san sheng	1.26
1.27	hu ru ping	1.27
1.28	gui ku	1.28
1.29	Zhending nü	1.29
1.30	Jiaoming	1.30
1.31	Ye sheng	1.31
1.32	sishi qian	1.32
1.33	Cheng xian	1.33
1.34	xinlang	1.34
1.35	ling guan	1.35
1.36	Wang Lan	1.36
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1.38	Wang Cheng	1.38
1.39	Qingfeng	1.39
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1.42	she pi	1.42
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1.46	miao gui	2.04
1.47	Lu pan	2.05
1.48	Yingning	2.06
1.49	Nie Xiaoqian	2.07
1.50	yi shu	2.08
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1.55	shui mang cao	2.14
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1.59	Zhuer	2.18
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2.07	jiu shan wang	2.29
2.08	Zunhua shu hu	2.30
2.09	Zhang Cheng	2.31
2.10	Fenzhou hu	2.32
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2.12	Wu ling	2.34
2.13	kou ji	2.35
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2.22	Hu shi	3.04
2.23	xishu	3.05
2.24	gai seng	3.06
2.25	fu hu	3.07
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3.18	gua yi	4.03
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4.69	Yanluo	6.32
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5.02	xiang gao	6.34
5.03	Dong gongzi	6.35
5.04	Zhou san	6.36
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5.44	A Xiu	7.31

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5.54	ju zha	8.02
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5.56	nan sheng zi	8.04
5.57	Zhong sheng	8.05
5.58	gui qi	8.06
5.59	Huang jiangjun	8.07
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5.62	cang shi	8.10
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6.14	mou yi	8.25
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6.17	chou hu	8.28
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6.52	fu weng	9.19
6.53	Wang Sima	9.20
6.54	Yue shen	9.21
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6.65	Wang Zian	9.32
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6.71	yi quan	9.38
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7.16	Xiang qun	10.09
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7.18	Zhangting	10.11
7.19	Xi Fangping	10.12
7.20	su qiu	10.13
7.21	Jia Fengzhi	10.14
7.22	yan zhi	10.15
7.23	A Xian	10.16
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7.33	ge jin	10.26
7.34	Huang Ying	11.02
7.35	shu chi	11.03
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7.37	qingwa shen	11.05
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8.09	si xun	11.18
8.10	hei gui	11.19
8.11	zhi cheng	11.20
8.12	Zhu Qing	11.21
8.13	Duan shi	11.22
8.14	hu nü	11.23
8.15	Zhang shi fu	11.24
8.16	Yu Ziyou	11.25
8.17	nan qie	11.26
8.18	Wang Keshou	11.27
8.19	niu du	11.28
8.20	Wang Da	11.29
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8.22	Xiangyu	11.31
8.23	san xian	11.32
8.24	gui li	11.33
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8.26	da nan	11.35
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8.29	Wei gongzi	11.37
8.30	Shi Qingxu	11.38
8.31	Zeng Youyu	11.39
8.32	Jiaping gongzi	11.40
8.33	er ban	12.01
8.34	che fu	12.02
8.35	ji xian	12.03
8.36	Miao sheng	12.04
8.37	xie ke	12.05
8.38	Du Xiaolei	12.06
8.39	Mao da fu	12.07
8.4	bao shen	12.08
8.41	Li Bagang	12.09
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8.49	Wang Gui'an	12.17
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8.51	Zhou sheng	12.19
8.52	Chu Suiliang	12.20
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8.56	Ji sheng	12.24
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8.6	ren zhen	12.28
8.61	Huan hou	12.29
8.62	fen die	12.30
8.63	Li Tansi	12.31
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8.65	Taiyuan yu	12.33
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Appendix 2

- Occurrences of the term *chi* in Collected *Liaozhai* rustic plays (*Liaozhai liqu ji*)

In addition to the examples listed in Chapter 6, Pu Songling also uses the term *chi* frequently in his rustic plays. The usages are very similar with those in the *Liaozhai* tales, and since many of the plots of these plays are based on these tales too, I have not listed them in the main text. They are included here for reference or comparison only.

Of the fifteen *liqu* which make up this anthology, the word *chi* appears in seven of them.⁵⁴⁹ The first, “An account from the top of the wall” (*qiangtou ji* 牆頭記) is the story of the relationship between an elderly widower, Zhang 張, and his two unfilial sons, Daguai 大怪 and Erguai 二怪.⁵⁵⁰ The boys urge their father to divide up his land as early as possible, but then refuse to do any work for him until a family friend, Wang 王, tricks them into believing there is more silver hidden away, whereupon they treat their father well.⁵⁵¹ When Zhang hears his sons’ suggestion that instead of them giving him food to cook, he just eat some of their leftovers, he responds: “I am stunned and have no words to say (*wo chixin bu ke yan* 我痴心不可言)”⁵⁵² The final act of this play deals with the boys’ discovery that they have been cheated, and is entitled “The foolish children are disappointed (*chi er shiwang* 痴兒失望).”⁵⁵³ When their father is very close to death, the eldest son describes his state of health to his brother: “And now he isn’t uttering a single word, but keeps his eyes closed just like a dull fool (*yi si dai chi* 一似呆痴)”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ In addition to those listed below, in “Rang du zhou” 禳妒咒 [An incantation against jealousy], there is just one occurrence, referring to a young boy *chi'er* 痴兒 playing. PSLQJ p. 2773, LZLQJ p. 333.

⁵⁵⁰ PSLQJ pp. 2443-2474, LZLQJ pp. 3-34

⁵⁵¹ Zou Zongliang 鄒宗良 has identified the main source for the plot of this tale as being the family of an old acquaintance of the author, the subject of a poem Pu wrote in 1711, (PSLQJ p. 1909, LZSJ p. 337) in which he recorded his indignation at the wicked way the younger generations treated this old man. See Zou Zongliang PSLQJ pp. 1-2

⁵⁵² PSLQJ p. 2445, LZLQJ p. 5

⁵⁵³ PSLQJ p. 2465, LZLQJ p. 25

⁵⁵⁴ PSLQJ, p. 2467, LZLQJ p. 27

In the fourth *liqu* in the collection, “Reversing demonic calamities” (Fan yan yang 翻魔殃)⁵⁵⁵ is a reworking of the *Liaozhai* tale “Qiu Daniang” (仇大娘; 7:25), in which the eponymous heroine saves the Qiu family from intimidation by a local hoodlum Wei Ming 魏名. All of Wei’s plans backfire on him, and the main theme of this tale is summed up by the Historian’s comment at the end “The more harm Wei tried to do, the more blessings the Qius received.” In an anecdote incidental to the main plot, one of Qiu’s sons refuses to help his brother-in-law, Fan Gua 范栝, cheat in the examinations. Fan angrily retorted: “You seem just like a stupid donkey or wooden horse (chi lü mu ma 痴驢木馬)”⁵⁵⁶ When Wei burns down the Qius’ residence, it is left desolate and the occupants are at a loss about what to do. The scene is described as: “Just like a thousand year old temple, home to some blind Daoists and stupid monks (xia dao chi seng 瞎道痴僧).”⁵⁵⁷

The *liqu* “An aria of a wintry forest” (han sen qu 寒森曲)⁵⁵⁸ is an extension of the plot of the tale Shang Sanguan (商三官; Vol. 3, no. 25) in which a girl dresses up as a man to take revenge on the noble who murdered her father. Disguised as an actor, she seduces the noble and then kills him, finally committing suicide. When the two corpses are discovered by other members of the household, “they were so terrified that their eyes became transfixed and they were stupefied 唬的目瞪口呆”⁵⁵⁹

The narrative comment at the end of the third act states: “When she was young she was a foolish pretty girl 年少嬌痴女, then she picked up a knife to avenge her father; living as a coward is a boy’s remorse, and the fear of death is a woman’s shame.”⁵⁶⁰ As well as this remarkably equal sharing of responsibility between the sexes, it is noteworthy that the girl loses her *chi* characteristic when she takes action to avenge her father.

⁵⁵⁵ PSLQJ pp. 2545-2623, LZLQJ pp. 105-183

⁵⁵⁶ PSLQJ p. 2588, LZLQJ p. 148

⁵⁵⁷ PSLQJ, p. 2610, LZLQJ p. 170

⁵⁵⁸ PSLQJ pp. 2625 - 2680 LZLQJ pp. 185-240

⁵⁵⁹ PSLQJ p. 2642, LZLQJ p. 202

⁵⁶⁰ PSLQJ p.2646, LZLQJ p. 206

The seventh *liqu*, “Penglai banquet” (Penglai yan 蓬萊宴)⁵⁶¹ is set amid the world of the immortals on Penglai island and concerns the relationship between a divine serving girl and the mortal scholar with whom she has fallen in love, and whose child she gives birth to. While the scholar is away taking the exams, the care of their child is entrusted to a maid named Wei Xiaochi (魏小痴)⁵⁶² who is referred to as Xiaochi throughout. This then leads to some play on words with her name: “Xiaochi was not foolish, but extraordinarily sharp (xiaochi bu chi, lingli de yichang 小痴不痴，伶俐的異常)”⁵⁶³ and “that Xiaochi was extremely intelligent (na xiaochi yiyang de congming 那小痴異樣的聰明).”⁵⁶⁴

The scholar fails the exam, but on the way home meets the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 who comments on him: “That lad already has a foolish immortal watching him (you chixian kanzhe ta 有痴仙看着他).”⁵⁶⁵ Lü then leads him to enlightenment, and immortality. He relates the story to the Queen Mother of the West, and describes the scholar’s gradual conversion: “After he had roamed across three rivers and five lakes, and discarded his foolish self which is of the mortal world (renjian chi zhangfu 人間痴丈夫), then I could teach him to reflect on himself and reach enlightenment.”⁵⁶⁶

The thirteenth *liqu*, “The rich noble immortals” (Fugui shenxian 富貴神仙)⁵⁶⁷ is a reworking of the *Liaozhai* tale in which the scholar Zhang Hongjian (張鴻漸; Vol. 9, no.29) writes an appeal to protest at the behaviour of a corrupt official. The eighteen year old Zhang is first described as: “In appearance an imposing youth, not crafty nor a lover of money, but having a very foolish mind (chixin haoji 痴心好急) he finds it difficult to make friends.”⁵⁶⁸ When the appeal fails and it is clear that Zhang must leave, his wife tearfully berates him: “You were perfectly well aware that it was a pit of fire but you just

⁵⁶¹ PSLQJ, pp. 2694-2723, LZLQJ pp. 253-283

⁵⁶² PSLQJ p. 2705, LZLQJ p. 265 The infant is referred to in this way in other places in this play, but I have not cited later instances separately.

⁵⁶³ PSLQJ p. 2708, LZLQJ p. 268

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ PSLQJ p. 2712, LZLQJ p. 272

⁵⁶⁶ PSLQJ p. 2716, LZLQJ p. 276

⁵⁶⁷ PSLQJ pp. 2891- 2978, LZLQJ pp. 451-538

⁵⁶⁸ PSLQJ p.2894, LZLQJ p. 454

jumped straight in! Who can be as foolish as this! (na you wei ren zheyang chi! 那有為人這樣痴)”⁵⁶⁹ After Zhang leaves, the official then imprisons his wife, so her brother takes the exams and finally has an opportunity to save her. While he is away, Zhang is helped by a fox spirit Shi Shunhua 施舜華, whom he marries, but he still misses home. Exasperated, she exclaims: “Let’s just forget it! I think loving someone foolishly (chixin lian ren 痴心戀人), has also lost its attraction!”⁵⁷⁰ But her reluctance to give him up is also demonstrated when she wonders: “Why are you still so foolish (weishenme hai chixin 為什麼還痴心), still refusing to let go of your other love?”⁵⁷¹

Shi uses her magic powers to enable Zhang to return and see his wife. When he arrives home, and his wife bursts into tears, he first imagines that it is all an illusion, and jokes to Shunhua to stop messing around. At this, his wife’s initial tears of joy turn to anger and she rebukes him: “As for you, you entirely heartless fool (mei liangxin de chiren 沒良心的痴人) living in my home, you ought to die in prison for all I care.”⁵⁷² Her anger proves to Zhang the reality of the situation. They chat together, then hear a local hooligan outside the door. Zhang kills him, again he has to leave his wife and again it is Shi who uses her powers to rescue him. Finally, Zhang and his son by Shi return home together, both having done well in the examinations, and they live together with Zhang’s first wife.

The final *liqu* in the collection “The play of the auspicious clouds (xing yun qu 幸雲曲)”⁵⁷³ is the story of a secret visit by the Ming Zhengde 正德 emperor (r. 1506-1521) to a brothel in Shanxi. In the fourteenth chapter, when the emperor meets the young virgin prostitute Second Sister 二姐 he thinks to himself: “I will have to pretend to be dull and crazy (chi dian 痴顛), to confuse her a little”⁵⁷⁴ The following act continues this

⁵⁶⁹ PSLQJ p. 2896, LZLQJ p. 456 This exclamation also appears in a section of the play which is repeated word for word in the following *liqu*, (Mo nan qu 磨難曲), PSLQJ p. 3002, LZLQJ p. 562. I have not cited the second reference separately. The entire plot of “A play about hardship” is in fact a reworking of the plot of “The rich noble immortals”, with a slightly different emphasis.

⁵⁷⁰ PSLQJ p. 2925, LZLQJ p. 485

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷² PSLQJ p. 2927, LZLQJ p. 487

⁵⁷³ PSLQJ pp.3151-3274, LZLQJ pp.711-834

⁵⁷⁴ PSLQJ p. 3210, LZLQJ p.770

theme and is entitled “Pretending to be foolish, Emperor Wuzong plays a trick (nong chi dai Wuzong zuoxi 弄痴呆武宗作戲); not wishing to be sullied, Second Sister is shy.”⁵⁷⁵ As he gradually reveals more of his true identity to her, she plays him some music on the *pipa*, and he teases her: “You played the piece as if it had neither a beginning nor an end, taking me for a stupid fool (nazhe an dangle chiyu 拿着俺當了痴愚).”⁵⁷⁶ When the emperor then refuses to bow to the son of a local official, the girl is convinced that he is certainly no ordinary man, but still does not quite know what to make of it: “At one side Second Sister was listening so delightedly that her eyes were staring in dazed confusion (xide mu deng chi mi 喜的目瞪口呆).”⁵⁷⁷ By the end of the play, the emperor is required to return to the capital, and he then hands out rewards and punishments to the commoners he had consorted with, according to the treatment he had received from them.

⁵⁷⁵ PSLQJ p. 3213, LZLQJ p. 773

⁵⁷⁶ PSLQJ p. 3219, LZLQJ p. 779

⁵⁷⁷ PSLQJ p. 3230, LZLQJ p. 790

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